

# SafeLives Dash risk checklist

## Quick start guidance

You may be looking at this checklist because you are working in a professional capacity with a victim of domestic abuse. These notes are to help you understand the significance of the questions on the checklist. Domestic abuse can take many forms but it is usually perpetrated by men towards women in an intimate relationship such as boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife. This checklist can also be used for lesbian, gay, bisexual relationships and for situations of 'honour'-based violence or family violence. Domestic abuse can include physical, emotional, mental, sexual or financial abuse as well as stalking and harassment. They might be experiencing one or all types of abuse; each situation is unique. It is the combination of behaviours that can be so intimidating. It can occur both during a relationship or after it has ended.

The purpose of the Dash risk checklist is to give a consistent and simple tool for practitioners who work with adult victims of domestic abuse in order to help them identify those who are at high risk of harm and whose cases should be referred to a Marac meeting in order to manage their risk. If you are concerned about risk to a child or children, you should make a referral to ensure that a full assessment of their safety and welfare is made.

### The Dash risk checklist should be introduced to the victim within the framework of your agency's:

- Confidentiality policy
- Information sharing policy and protocols
- Marac referral policies and protocols

### Before you begin to ask the questions in the checklist:

- Establish how much time the victim has to talk to you: is it safe to talk now? What are safe contact details?
- Establish the whereabouts of the perpetrator and children
- Explain why you are asking these questions and how it relates to the Marac

### While you are asking the questions in the checklist:

- Identify early on who the victim is frightened of – ex-partner/partner/family member
- Use gender neutral terms such as partner/ex-partner. By creating a safe, accessible environment LGBT victims accessing the service will feel able to disclose both domestic abuse and their sexual orientation or gender identity.

### Revealing the results of the checklist to the victim

Telling someone that they are at high risk of serious harm or homicide may be frightening and overwhelming for them to hear. It is important that you state what your concerns are by using the answers they gave to you and your professional judgement. It is then important that you follow your area's protocols when referring to Marac and Children's Services. Equally, identifying that someone is not currently high risk needs to be managed carefully to ensure that the person doesn't feel that their situation is being minimised and that they don't feel embarrassed about asking for help. Explain that these factors are linked to homicide and serious harm and that if s/he experiences any of them in future, that they should get back in touch with your service or with the emergency services on 999 in an immediate crisis.

Please pay particular attention to a practitioner's professional judgement in all cases. The results from a checklist are not a definitive assessment of risk. They should provide you with a structure to inform your judgement and act as prompts to further questioning, analysis and risk management whether via a Marac or in another way.

### The responsibility for identifying your local referral threshold rests with your local MARAC.

## Resources

Be sure that you have an awareness of the safety planning measures you can offer, both within your own agency and other agencies. Be familiar with local and national resources to refer the victim to, including specialist services. The following websites and contact details may be useful to you:

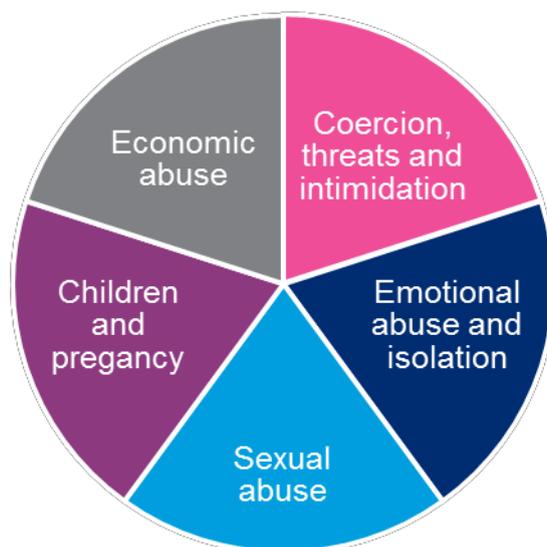
- **The Northern Ireland 24-Hour Freephone Domestic Violence Helpline** 0800 802 1414  
[www.dsahelpline.org](http://www.dsahelpline.org)
- **Honour Network helpline** - 0800 5999247 - For advice on forced marriage and 'honour'-based violence <http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk>
- **Rape and sexual assault** <http://www.nexusni.org/>  
Belfast: 028 9032 6803  
L'derry: 028 7126 0566  
Enniskillen: 028 6632 0046
- **Gay helpline** 0808 8000 390 <http://www.cara-friend.org.uk/projects/lgbt-switchboard-ni>
- **Lesbian helpline** 028 9023 8668;
- **Rainbow Project** 028 9031 9030 <http://www.rainbow-project.org/>

## Asking about types of abuse and risk factors

### Physical abuse

We ask about physical abuse in questions 1, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19 and 23.

- Physical abuse can take many forms from a push or shove to a punch, use of weapons, choking or strangulation.
- You should try and establish if the abuse is getting worse, or happening more often, or the incidents themselves are more serious. If your client is not sure, ask them to document how many incidents there have been in the last year and what took place. They should also consider keeping a diary marking when physical and other incidents take place.
- Try and get a picture of the range of physical abuse that has taken place. The incident that is currently being disclosed may not be the worst thing to have happened.
- The abuse might also be happening to other people in their household, such as their children or siblings or elderly relatives.
- Sometimes violence will be used against a family pet.
- If an incident has just occurred the victim should call 999 for assistance from the police. If the victim has injuries they should try and get them seen and documented by a health professional such as a GP or A&E nurse.



### Sexual abuse

We ask about whether the victim is experiencing any form of sexual abuse in question 16.

- Sexual abuse can include the use of threats, force or intimidation to obtain sex, deliberately inflicting pain during sex, or combining sex and violence and using weapons.
- If the victim has suffered sexual abuse you should encourage them to get medical attention and to report this to the police. See above for advice on finding a Sexual Assault Referral Centre which can assist with medical and legal investigations.

### Coercion, threats and intimidation

Coercion, threats and intimidation are covered in questions 2, 3, 6, 8, 14, 17, 18, 19, 23 and 24.

- It is important to understand and establish: the fears of the victim/victims in relation to what the perpetrator/s may do; who they are frightened of and who they are frightened for (e.g. children/siblings). Victims usually know the abuser's behaviour better than anyone else which is why this question is significant.
- In cases of 'honour' based violence there may be more than one abuser living in the home or belonging to the wider family and community. This could also include female relatives.

Name of victim:

Date:

Restricted when complete

- Stalking and harassment becomes more significant when the abuser is also making threats to harm themselves, the victim or others. They might use phrases such as “If I can’t have you no one else can...”
- Other examples of behaviour that can indicate future harm include obsessive phone calls, texts or emails, uninvited visits to the victim’s home or workplace, loitering and destroying/vandalising property.
- Advise the victim to keep a diary of these threats, when and where they happen, if anyone else was with them and if the threats made them feel frightened.
- Separation is a dangerous time: establish if the victim has tried to separate from the abuser or has been threatened about the consequences of leaving. Being pursued after separation can be particularly dangerous.
- Victims of domestic abuse sometimes tell us that the perpetrators harm pets, damage furniture and this alone makes them frightened without the perpetrator needing to physically hurt them. This kind of intimidation is common and often used as a way to control and frighten.
- Some perpetrators of domestic abuse do not follow court orders or contact arrangements with children. Previous violations may be associated with an increase in risk of future violence.
- Some victims feel frightened and intimidated by the criminal history of their partner/ex-partner. It is important to remember that offenders with a history of violence are at increased risk of harming their partner, even if the past violence was not directed towards intimate partners or family members, except for ‘honour’-based violence, where the perpetrator(s) will commonly have no other recorded criminal history.

### Emotional abuse and isolation

We ask about emotional abuse and isolation in questions 4, 5 and 12. This can be experienced at the same time as the other types of abuse. It may be present on its own or it may have started long before any physical violence began. The result of this abuse is that victims can blame themselves and, in order to live with what is happening, minimise and deny how serious it is. As a professional you can assist the victim in beginning to consider the risks the victim and any children may be facing.

- The victim may be being prevented from seeing family or friends, from creating any support networks or prevented from having access to any money.
- Victims of ‘honour’ based violence talk about extreme levels of isolation and being ‘policed’ in the home. This is a significant indicator of future harm and should be taken seriously.
- Due to the abuse and isolation being suffered victims feel like they have no choice but to continue living with the abuser and fear what may happen if they try and leave. This can often have an impact on the victim’s mental health, and they might feel depressed or even suicidal.
- Equally the risk to the victim is greater if their partner/ex-partner has mental health problems such as depression and if they abuse drugs or alcohol. This can increase the level of isolation as victims can feel like agencies won’t understand and will judge them. They may feel frightened that revealing this information will get them and their partner into trouble and, if they have children, they may worry that they will be removed. These risks are addressed in questions 21 & 22.

### Children and pregnancy

Questions 7, 9 and 18 refer to being pregnant and children and whether there is conflict over child contact.

- The presence of children including stepchildren can increase the risk of domestic abuse for the mother. They too can get caught up in the violence and suffer directly.
- Physical violence can occur for the first time or get worse during pregnancy or for the first few years of the child’s life. There are usually lots of professionals involved during this time, such as health visitors or midwives, who need to be aware of the risks to the victim and children, including an unborn child.
- The perpetrator may use the children to have access to the victim, abusive incidents may occur during child contact visits or there may be a lot of fear and anxiety that the children may be harmed.
- Please follow your local Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for identifying and making referrals to Children’s Services.

### Economic abuse

Economic abuse is covered in question 20.

- Victims of domestic abuse often tell us that they are financially controlled by their partners/ex-partners. Consider how the financial control impacts on the safety options available to them. For

example, they may rely on their partner/ex-partner for an income or do not have access to benefits in their own right. The victim might feel like the situation has become worse since their partner/ex-partner lost their job.

- The Citizens Advice Bureau or the local specialist domestic abuse support service will be able to outline to the victim the options relating to their current financial situation and how they might be able to access funds in their own right

**If you are a professional working with domestic abuse and would like to know more about the Dash risk checklist you can find the following publications on our website:**

- **SafeLives Dash risk checklist for the identification of high risk cases of domestic abuse, stalking and honour based violence**

<http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Dash%20for%20IDVAs%20FINAL.pdf>

This is a helpful guide for Idvas or practitioners new to the Dash risk checklist and who want to become more familiar and confident in managing the process. It takes you through the process of completing the checklist with your client and provides detail on why and how to ask each question. This guide also provides supplementary questions to gather additional detail about each risk factor and provides general safety planning advice.

It includes the Severity of Abuse Grid (SAG). The SAG gives practitioners the chance to profile the domestic abuse in more detail and identify significant concerns which may be relevant to include in a safety plan or share at a Marac.

- **SafeLives Dash risk checklist – without guidance**

<http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Dash%20without%20guidance%20FINAL.pdf> This is a basic version of the RIC to download and use in everyday practice.

- **SafeLives Dash risk checklist – frequently asked questions**

<http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/FAQs%20about%20Dash%20FINAL.pdf> This addresses a number of practical questions relating to the use of the checklist.

We also have a library of resources and information about training for frontline practitioners at <http://safelives.org.uk/practice-support/resources-frontline-domestic-abuse-workers-and-idvas>



# SafeLives Dash risk checklist

## Aim of the form

- To help front line practitioners identify high risk cases of domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'-based violence.
- To decide which cases should be referred to Marac and what other support might be required. A completed form becomes an active record that can be referred to in future for case management.
- To offer a common tool to agencies that are part of the Marac process and provide a shared understanding of risk in relation to domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'-based violence.
- To enable agencies to make defensible decisions based on the evidence from extensive research of cases, including domestic homicides and 'near misses', which underpins most recognised models of risk assessment.

## How to use the form

Before completing the form for the first time we recommend that you read the quick start guidance for domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'-based violence on page 7 of this toolkit. Full practice guidance and FAQs can also be downloaded here: <http://safelives.org.uk/practice-support/resources-identifying-risk-victims-face>. Risk is dynamic and can change very quickly. It is good practice to review the checklist after a new incident.

## Recommended referral criteria to Marac

1. **Professional judgement:** if a professional has serious concerns about a victim's situation, they should refer the case to Marac. There will be occasions where the particular context of a case gives rise to serious concerns even if the victim has been unable to disclose the information that might highlight their risk more clearly. ***This could reflect extreme levels of fear, cultural barriers to disclosure, immigration issues or language barriers particularly in cases of 'honour'-based violence.*** This judgement would be based on the professional's experience and/or the victim's perception of their risk even if they do not meet criteria 2 and/or 3 below.
2. **'Visible High Risk':** the number of 'ticks' on this checklist. If you have ticked 14 or more 'yes' boxes the case would normally meet the Marac referral criteria.
3. **Potential Escalation:** the number of police callouts to the victim as a result of domestic violence in the past 12 months. This criterion can be used to identify cases where there is not a positive identification of a majority of the risk factors on the list, but where abuse appears to be escalating and where it is appropriate to assess the situation more fully by sharing information at Marac. It is common practice to start with 3 or more police callouts in a 12 month period but **this will need to be reviewed** depending on your local volume and your level of police reporting.

Please pay particular attention to a practitioner's professional judgement in all cases. The results from a checklist are not a definitive assessment of risk. They should provide you with a structure to inform your judgement and act as prompts to further questioning, analysis and risk management whether via a Marac or in another way. **The responsibility for identifying your local referral threshold rests with your local Marac.**

## What this form is not

This form will provide valuable information about the risks that children are living with but it is not a full risk assessment for children. The presence of children increases the wider risks of domestic violence and step children are particularly at risk. If risk towards children is highlighted, you should consider what referral you need to make to obtain a full assessment of the children's situation.

Name of victim:

Date:

Restricted when complete

**SafeLives Dash risk checklist for use by Idvas and other non-police agencies<sup>1</sup> for identification of risks when domestic abuse, 'honour'- based violence and/or stalking are disclosed**

Please explain that the purpose of asking these questions is for the safety and protection of the individual concerned.  Tick the box if the factor is present. Please use the comment box at the end of the form to expand on any answer.  It is assumed that your main source of information is the victim. If this is <b>not the case</b> , please indicate in the right hand column	YES	NO	DON' T KNOW	State source of info if not the victim (eg police officer)
<b>1. Has the current incident resulted in injury?</b> Please state what and whether this is the first injury.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>2. Are you very frightened?</b> Comment:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>3. What are you afraid of? Is it further injury or violence?</b> Please give an indication of what you think [name of abuser(s)] might do and to whom, including children. Comment:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>4. Do you feel isolated from family/friends?</b> le, does [name of abuser(s)] try to stop you from seeing friends/family/doctor or others? Comment:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>5. Are you feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>6. Have you separated or tried to separate from [name of abuser(s)] within the past year?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>7. Is there conflict over child contact?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>8. Does [name of abuser(s)] constantly text, call, contact, follow, stalk or harass you?</b> Please expand to identify what and whether you believe that this is done deliberately to intimidate you? Consider the context and behaviour of what is being done.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>9. Are you pregnant or have you recently had a baby (within the last 18 months)?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>10. Is the abuse happening more often?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>11. Is the abuse getting worse?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>12. Does [name of abuser(s)] try to control everything you do and/or are they excessively jealous?</b> For example: in terms of relationships; who you see; being 'policed' at home; telling you what to wear. Consider 'honour'-based violence (HBV) and specify behaviour.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>13. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever used weapons or objects to hurt you?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>14. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever threatened to kill you or someone else and you believed them?</b> If yes, tick who: You <input type="checkbox"/> Children <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

<sup>1</sup> Note: This checklist is consistent with the ACPO endorsed risk assessment model DASH 2009 for the police service.

Name of victim:

Date:

Restricted when complete

Tick the box if the factor is present. Please use the comment box at the end of the form to expand on any answer.	YES	NO	DON'T	State source of info
<b>15. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever attempted to strangle / choke / suffocate / drown you?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>16. Does [name of abuser(s)] do or say things of a sexual nature that make you feel bad or that physically hurt you or someone else?</b> If someone else, specify who.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>17. Is there any other person who has threatened you or who you are afraid of?</b> If yes, please specify whom and why. Consider extended family if HBV.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>18. Do you know if [name of abuser(s)] has hurt anyone else?</b> Consider HBV. Please specify whom, including the children, siblings or elderly relatives: Children <input type="checkbox"/> Another family member <input type="checkbox"/> Someone from a previous relationship <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>19. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever mistreated an animal or the family pet?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>20. Are there any financial issues?</b> For example, are you dependent on [name of abuser(s)] for money/have they recently lost their job/other financial issues?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>21. Has [name of abuser(s)] had problems in the past year with drugs (prescription or other), alcohol or mental health leading to problems in leading a normal life?</b> If yes, please specify which and give relevant details if known. Drugs <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>22. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever threatened or attempted suicide?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>23. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever broken bail/an injunction and/or formal agreement for when they can see you and/or the children?</b> You may wish to consider this in relation to an ex-partner of the perpetrator if relevant. Bail conditions <input type="checkbox"/> Non Molestation/Occupation Order <input type="checkbox"/> Child contact arrangements <input type="checkbox"/> Forced Marriage Protection Order <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>24. Do you know if [name of abuser(s)] has ever been in trouble with the police or has a criminal history?</b> If yes, please specify: Domestic abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual violence <input type="checkbox"/> Other violence <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Total 'yes' responses</b>				

Name of victim:

Date:

Restricted when complete

The Northern Ireland Dept of Health, Social Services and Public Safety recommend that the following issues are also explored:	YES	NO	DON'T	State source of info
25. Are there any children, step children that aren't [name of abuser(s)] in the household? Or are there other dependants in the household? (i.e. older relative)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
26. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever hurt the children/dependants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
27. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever threatened to hurt or kill the children/dependants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### For consideration by professional

Is there any other relevant information (from victim or professional) which may increase risk levels? Consider victim's situation in relation to disability, substance misuse, mental health issues, cultural / language barriers, 'honour'- based systems, geographic isolation and minimisation. Are they willing to engage with your service? Describe.	
Consider abuser's occupation / interests. Could this give them unique access to weapons? Describe.	
What are the victim's greatest priorities to address their safety?	

Do you believe that there are reasonable grounds for referring this case to Marac?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, have you made a referral?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Signed		Date
Do you believe that there are risks facing the children in the family?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, please confirm if you have made a referral to safeguard the children?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Signed		Date referral made
Name		Date

Name of victim:

Date:

Restricted when complete

### Practitioner's notes

This document reflects work undertaken by SafeLives in partnership with Laura Richards, Consultant Violence Adviser to ACPO. We would like to thank Advance, Blackburn with Darwen Women's Aid and Berkshire East Family Safety Unit and all the partners of the Blackpool MARAC for their contribution in piloting the revised checklist without which we could not have amended the original SafeLives risk identification checklist. We are very grateful to Elizabeth Hall of CAFCASS and Neil Blacklock of Respect for their advice and encouragement and for the expert input we received from Jan Pickles, Dr Amanda Robinson and Jasvinder Sanghera.