

# SafeLives Dash risk checklist

## Frequently asked questions

These frequently asked questions were written when the Dash risk checklist was first introduced in 2009 and we have updated to reflect current practice and frequently asked questions.

### What is the Dash risk checklist for?

The purpose of the Dash (domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'-based violence) checklist is to give a consistent and simple to use tool to practitioners who work with victims of domestic abuse in order to help them identify the risk of harm that victims are experiencing. Victims assessed as being at high risk of harm should be referred to Marac ([Multi agency risk assessment conference](#)) and an Idva in order to manage the risk. The Dash is also used to identify immediate actions to address risk, and where it is used consistently across agencies, it creates a shared language around risk which improves multi-agency working.

### Who should use it?

Practitioners working with victims of domestic abuse. This will include both domestic abuse specialists such as Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (Idvas) and generic practitioners such as those working in a primary care health service or housing.

The checklist has been designed and the [practice guidance](#) written with the aim to support those practitioners who are perhaps less confident in addressing the questions contained within it.

### When should the Dash risk checklist be used?

The Dash should be used whenever a practitioner receives an initial disclosure of domestic abuse. As you will be aware, risk in domestic abuse situations is dynamic and can change very quickly. Thus it may be appropriate to review the checklist with a client on more than one occasion. It is designed to be used for those suffering current rather than historic domestic abuse and ideally would be used close in time to the last incident of abuse that somebody has suffered.

### Why should the Dash risk checklist be used?

Using an evidence based risk identification tool increases the likelihood of the victim being responded to appropriately and therefore of addressing the risks they face. The Dash risk checklist gives practitioners common criteria and a common language of risk.

### Do I have to ask every question?

Yes. It is important that we get a comprehensive view of the risks that somebody suffers. Without this, there is a danger that one may overlook something significant in a case which causes an agency's response to be inadequate.

### Why are there two versions of Dash?

When the Dash was first introduced in 2009 there were two models of the risk identification checklist, the SafeLives Dash and the ACPO Dash (risk assessment and management tool). The ACPO Dash used by the Police was completely aligned and based on the same analysis and approach. However, as there are practical differences in the responsibility held by police officers, the risk tool for police included an additional three additional questions which clarified the situation in relation to children<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Some Police first responders are now using the Dara (Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment), please see this briefing on key information around the Dara and the Dash

[https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Dara\\_briefing\\_Multiagency%20partners.pdf](https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Dara_briefing_Multiagency%20partners.pdf)

## Can you explain the referral thresholds included in the guidance?

The referral thresholds included in the Dash guidance relate to the thresholds for referring someone to Marac ([Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference](#)), which is a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

There is a detailed explanation of the referral thresholds in the [risk identification document](#) but they are based on three principles:

- **Professional judgement:** where a professional has serious concerns about a victim's situation. 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.
- **'Visible High Risk':** the number of 'ticks' on the Dash risk checklist. If you have ticked 14 or more 'yes' boxes the case would normally meet the Marac referral criteria.
- **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.

At the same time as being referred to the Marac the victim will be referred to the Idva, to ensure they receive appropriate support.

## What about cases that do not meet the threshold of 14 ticks?

Inevitably, there will be cases that fall below the actuarial threshold where you as a practitioner have genuine concerns about a victim and here you have full discretion to use your professional judgement to refer them to the Marac and the Idva working with victims at high risk of harm.

When a victim is not identified as being at high risk of harm and a referral has not been made to Marac, a victim should still be offered support from an appropriate support service. With the victims consent the information gathered through the completion of the Dash risk checklist can be shared with that service in order to inform the support they offer. We would recommend that you familiarise yourself with local support services and their referral criteria including specific by and for services which support victims from minoritized communities.

## What is the Severity of Abuse Grid?

The severity of abuse grid is a tool that has been developed to use alongside the Dash risk checklist to help identify more precisely both the severity of risk that an individual faces and also how that risk changes over time. It is designed to give you a framework for identifying specific features of the abuse suffered by the individual you are working with and help guide you both in addressing their safety in an informed and coherent way. It may also provide information that will be relevant for those cases going to Marac.

There is full guidance on using the grid in the [risk identification checklist](#).

## How does the Checklist work in relation to 'honour'-based violence?

You will see that all of the questions include the possibility that there is more than one perpetrator in a case thus giving victims the option of disclosing additional people who they are frightened of, or who they feel threatened by, in addition to an intimate partner. Further, there are direct questions about 'honour'-based violence in the checklist which will help practitioners to identify these cases.

It is important to stress that it is highly likely that you will need to use your professional judgement in identifying whether an 'honour'-based violence case should be referred to Marac since much of the checklist covers wider criminal behaviour which may be absent in cases of 'honour'-based violence and thus they are unlikely to meet the actuarial threshold for referral.

The security issues around information sharing are particularly relevant in cases of 'honour'-based violence and the victim must ALWAYS be asked who it is safe to share information with.

Please note that during the piloting of the checklist it served to help identify a very small number of HBV cases. Any feedback about its use in relation to HBV from practitioners would be much appreciated.

## How does the Checklist work in relation to stalking?

We would recommend that in cases where stalking is identified that this is taken very seriously and that reference is made to the types of behaviour that are identified in the severity of abuse grid so that particularly high risk aspects of stalking are identified and dealt with where appropriate. The Dash checklist is designed for use in cases of intimate partner and wider family violence and thus is not appropriate for use in cases where stalking occurs and there has been no previous relationship. Please see Paladin Service for a [stalking risk screening checklist](#) (known as S-Dash) and specific support around stalking.

## How does the Checklist work in relation to LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse?

SafeLives has consulted with experts in the field of working with LGBT+ victims and we have included additional guidance about how to ask the questions and some of the additional barriers that may exist for reporting victims from these communities.

For further information about working with LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse, please see our [Spotlight](#) and [Free to be Safe](#) report.

## How does the Checklist work in relation to family violence?

The checklist can now be used in cases of intergenerational violence, such as an adult son abusing his mother, and should be completed and assessed in the same way as for an intimate partner case.

## Who should be using the [practice guidance](#)?

The guidance was originally drafted for use by Idva's. However, we believe that much of it would be relevant for ALL practitioners working with victims of domestic abuse, although the specific safety options which each agency could offer may differ.

## How was the Checklist piloted?

The checklist was piloted extensively with three Idva services, with three police forces and with a number of the partner agencies who attend the Blackpool Marac. We integrated their feedback and are very grateful to them for their support in this work.

We were also able to cross reference our conclusions with work undertaken by Cafcass, Respect and Relate who had carried out a comprehensive evaluation of the previous checklist and who had identified a number of areas for development which we believe have now been addressed.

## What about the children – can this Checklist be used in relation to children?

This checklist is designed to identify risk to an adult victim of domestic abuse. However, since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children who witness domestic abuse are now considered victims in their own right. Thus, while this is not designed as a risk assessment tool for children, it is very likely to identify children who are at high risk of harm and who should be in receipt of additional support.

The checklist clearly asks that every practitioner who fills this out in relation to an adult victim and is aware that there are children in that household must make a referral to ensure that those children are safeguarded. We are clear that without a risk identification tool for adults, the safety of many children will be missed and that referrals need to be made where children are living in households where domestic abuse is taking place.

The [SafeLives Risk Identification Checklist \(RIC\) for the identification of risk in cases of domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'-based violence in young people's relationships](#) is also available for use specifically with young people. The Young People's Checklist will allow you to apply the wide ranging research available on risk in adult cases of domestic abuse, combined with evidence base that relates to young people experiencing intimate partner abuse, and use it to begin the risk assessment process with a young person who is being harmed within a relationship.

## Where do the risk factors come from?

The risk factors included are drawn from extensive research by leading academics in the field into domestic homicides and 'near misses'. The research base for each factor can be found in the [practice guidance](#).

## What should I do if I have concerns about a victim's safety after I complete the checklist but it does not meet the threshold in my area for a referral to Marac?

You should signpost the victim to your local specialist domestic abuse service while reiterating the need to call the police in the event of a crisis.

It would be good practice for professionals to familiarise themselves with the range of specialist Domestic Abuse support available in their local area so that they can signpost and refer victims to them.

This information can be found by searching the following

- <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory/>
- Your local council website
- Your local police and crime commissioner website

SafeLives

May 2023