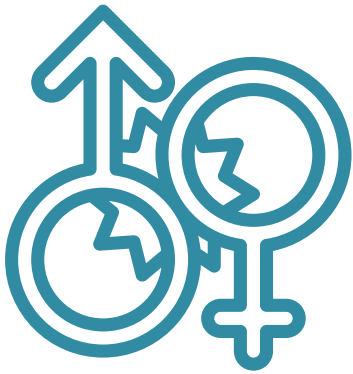


# GUIDANCE FOR NHS VOLUNTEERS: DOMESTIC ABUSE AND COVID-19

As an NHS Check in and Chat, Community Response or Patient Transport volunteer, you may support individuals and families who are experiencing domestic abuse. This guide provides information about what domestic abuse is and how you can provide a safe and supportive response to individuals and families. Domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour has increased during the COVID-19 crisis. Home is not a safe place for everyone, and our vital services are under pressure. As an NHS volunteer, you may come into contact with survivors and their families. We must let survivors know that they are not alone, there is no excuse for abuse and that support is available.

## WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE AND COERCIVE AND CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR?



The UK government's definition of domestic abuse is, "any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or 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
- Economic
- 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."

For more information about the forms of domestic abuse, please go to the Government's webpage on [Domestic abuse: How to get help](#).

## WHO CAN EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC ABUSE?



**Anyone** can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, sexual orientation, disability, religion or socioeconomic status, however, women are much more likely to be victims than men and domestic abuse is a gendered issue[1].

Abuse can be perpetrated by partners, ex-partners and family members, including children under the age of 18, adult children or siblings.

[1] Caada (2014), In Plain Sight: Effective help for children exposed to domestic abuse. Bristol: Caada

130,000 children live in households where there is high risk domestic abuse.

[See more information](#) about what domestic abuse is and who are the victims of domestic abuse.

## HOW TO RESPOND TO DOMESTIC ABUSE



An individual you're in contact with may tell you that they are experiencing domestic abuse. They might not say 'I am a victim of domestic abuse', but could disclose in other ways. Some examples include:

- 'I don't feel safe right now', 'I don't feel safe at home'
- 'I'm scared/frightened of my (ex) partner/family member'
- 'My (ex) partner/family member won't let me out of the house' (or any other controlling behaviour mentioned, pick up prescriptions, do the shopping, go for a walk, etc.)
- 'My (ex) partner/family member hurt(s) me'
- 'My (ex) partner/family member controls everything I do'
- 'My (ex) partner/family member is always putting me down/makes me feel worthless.'

You may also have concerns that an individual you're in contact with is experiencing domestic abuse based on what you see/hear. Some examples include:

- Witnessing abusive behaviour (aggressive, controlling, yelling, demeaning and belittling, bullying)
- Noticing that the victim seems fearful of their partner/family member
- Noticing that the survivor is unable to speak with you alone or in detail about their current circumstances
- Noticing evidence of physical abuse, including bruises and scratches.

If the individual you are in contact with has indicated that they are experiencing abuse, it's okay to ask them about their situation. It's up to them to decide whether to tell you more, and that's okay. Trust your gut – if something doesn't feel right and you are worried about their safety, it is always best to speak with Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) support team or your local volunteer manager for support.

It's important to make sure that the individual you are in contact with is **alone** and **safe** before speaking with them about abuse. This is particularly the case when supporting them over the phone. Only ask 'closed' questions to establish this, allowing them to give 'yes' or 'no' answers. E.g

- 'Are you alone?'
- 'Is it safe to ask you some questions about your relationship with \_\_\_?'

Here are some ways that you could let the individual know that it is okay to talk to you about domestic abuse:

- 'You've mentioned that you're scared of your partner. Would you like to tell me more about that?'
- 'You've mentioned a few things to me about your son that sounded concerning, for example, he won't let you go on walks or pick up your own prescriptions. Would you like to talk about that?'
- 'I heard your partner shouting aggressively in the background, are you feeling safe at the moment?'

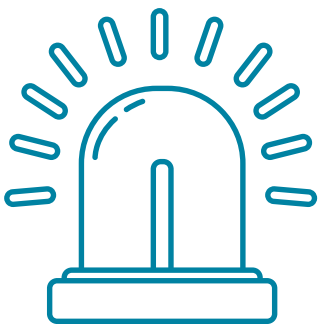
If you are worried about someone you are supporting, even if they have not disclosed abuse, trust your instincts and call the RVS support line on 0808 1963382.



If an individual you're in contact with tells you that they are experiencing domestic abuse, it is important to:

- Listen to them without judgement
  - Never blame them for the abuse or excuse the perpetrator's behaviour or ask them why they have not left/tell them to leave
- Believe them
- Validate what they are telling you
  - For example, 'I'm really glad you told me', 'this isn't your fault', 'you are not alone'
- Ask them what they need and be guided by them
  - The survivor is always the expert in their own life. It is important to be patient and allow them to set the pace
- If possible and safe to do so, share information about how to get specialist support (see list below)
- Let survivors know that it is still ok to **call 999 in an emergency and the police are attending calls during the COVID-19 lockdown**
  - Let them know about the **Silent Solution** system for situations when someone calling 999 is unable to speak. Call 999 and press 55 when prompted. There is no need to speak at all.
  - If the survivor can't call because they are deaf or can't verbally communicate, let them know about the **emergency text service**
  - Reassure them that the police have a duty to protect everyone. No one should be discriminated against for any reason - including their immigration status
- Let them know that people are allowed to be in public spaces despite the lockdown measures if their homes are not safe places - this includes children and young people. **The Government has confirmed** that if someone is **experiencing abuse they can leave their home to seek help**
- Remind them of the confidentiality statement made at the beginning of the call/visit, and that you will need to discuss the situation with your safeguarding lead to ensure that you take the right steps to keep them safe and support them going forward

## WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY



If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to the victim, children, perpetrator or anyone else in the household, encourage them to immediately call 999 and refer to the information above regarding the **Silent Solution** system and the **emergency text service**.

If they are unable to call the Police and you are worried about their immediate safety, get as much information as you can regarding their location and call 999. **Do not call the police if there is no immediate risk and the survivor has not asked you to, as this may alert the perpetrator to the survivor's disclosure.**

You can also report a crime by calling the Police on 101, or anonymously report a crime by calling Crime Stoppers on 0800 555 111 or **online**.

You may feel worried about what will happen if the perpetrator suspects you reported the abuse to the Police. Never confront the perpetrator and ensure you take steps to protect your own safety too.

## INFORM YOUR SAFEGUARDING LEAD ABOUT THE DISCLOSURE

When you have received **any** disclosure of domestic abuse, it is important to immediately inform your designated safeguarding lead through the RVS. Contact the RVS Support Team on 0808 196 3382.

They will ensure that any necessary safeguarding measures are put in a place and will help ensure that volunteers conduct safe and supporting contact with the survivor and their family going forward.

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND SAFEGUARDING SURVIVORS, CHILDREN AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

As an NHS volunteer responder, you have been informed that everything shared between you and the individuals you are supporting is confidential. However, information can and should be shared with the relevant professionals in the following situations:

- The survivor asks you to share information with a professional (such as a support agency, the police or Children's Social Care) or family member/friend
- An adult or child is at risk of immediate harm and you need to contact emergency services
- A child is living in a household where there is domestic abuse and you need to inform the relevant safeguarding lead who can make a child safeguarding referral
- An adult is vulnerable and at risk of harm to themselves or others and you need to inform the relevant safeguarding lead who can make an adult safeguarding referral
- To inform your safeguarding lead to ensure the disclosure is appropriately recorded and any necessary safeguarding steps are considered by professionals
- If a crime has been or is about to be committed



## SELF CARE

Talking to someone about their experience of domestic abuse can be distressing for you too. It's important to care for your mental health and wellbeing after responding to a domestic abuse disclosure. Some ways of doing this include:

- Debriefing with someone you trust in a way that maintains the individual's/family's confidentiality. This may be one of your own friends/family members or it may be an allocated volunteer supervision/RVS support team.
- Take a break and do something that takes your mind off what you've just heard: go on a walk, do some gardening, drink a cup of tea, listen to your favourite podcast or television show
- Set boundaries: it's important that you are clear with the individuals you're supporting about when and how you can or can't support them. Maintaining your own privacy and confidentiality is an important way of doing this. E.g. don't disclose your full name and address or those of your family members. The individuals you are supporting will also appreciate honesty and clarity about how you can help
- Be kind to yourself: talking to someone about their experience while being kind and non-judgemental and informing them of the available support is one of the best ways you can help them, but ultimately you alone can't make them safe. Know what your limits are and that what you've done is enough.

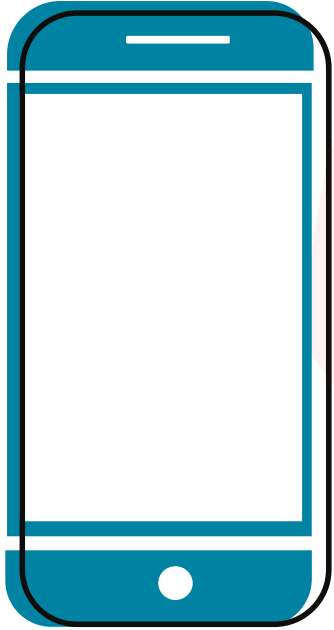


## IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE

You too may be affected personally by domestic abuse, either as a survivor, a perpetrator, or a friend/family member. You are not alone, there is no excuse for abuse and there is support available. You can call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247. Please see the full list of national resources available below. Call 999 if you or someone else is at an immediate risk of harm, and speak to a trusted family member or friend about your experience.

## RESOURCES

### HELPLINES



- England: Freephone 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247 (run by Refuge)
- Women's Aid live chat service (available Monday to Friday, 10am-4pm, Saturday - Sunday 10am-12pm)
- Northern Ireland: 0808 802 1414
- Scotland: 0800 027 1234
- Wales: 0808 8010 800
- Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327
- Respect helpline: 0808 802 4040 (for anyone worried that they may be harming someone else)
- Dyn Wales/Dyn Cymru: 0808 801 0321 (for men in Wales experiencing domestic abuse)
- Galop: 0800 999 5428 (national helpline for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people experiencing domestic abuse)
- Forced Marriage Unit: 0207 008 0151
- Paladin - National Stalking Advocacy Service: 020 3866 4107

### RESOURCES FOR VICTIMS/SURVIVORS

- [SafeLives staying safe at home guidance](#)
- [Chayn Soul Medicine](#)
- [SafeLives guide to staying safe online](#)
- [The Survivors Handbook, Women's Aid](#)
- [Guidance on Economic Abuse during COVID-19, Surviving Economic Abuse](#)

### RESOURCES FOR FAMILY, FRIENDS, NEIGHBOURS AND COLLEAGUES

- [Supporting friends, family members, neighbours and colleagues guidance](#)
- [Podcast: helping a friend/family member experiencing abuse](#)
- [Guidance for employers](#)
- [Joint Sector COVID-19 Advice for Survivors and Communities](#)



## RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19



This document was put together by SafeLives and IRISi. For more information visit [www.safelives.org.uk](http://www.safelives.org.uk) or [www.irisio.org](http://www.irisio.org)