

DASH Risk Checklist Quick Start Guidance





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About this Guidance

You may be looking at the DASH risk indicator checklist (DASH RIC) because you are working in a professional capacity with a victim-survivor of domestic abuse. This guidance is designed to help you understand the significance of the questions on the DASH RIC.

Domestic abuse can take many forms, but 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 so-called “honour”-based abuse or family violence.

Domestic abuse can include physical, emotional, mental, sexual or financial abuse as well as stalking and harassment. The victim-survivor might be experiencing one or all types of abuse; it is important to remember that each situation is unique.

Domestic abuse can occur during a relationship and/or after it has ended.

Contact Us

Please contact Scotland@SafeLives.org.uk for further information or questions in relation to this guidance.

Visit the SafeLives website to find out more about our work, access a range of resources for professionals, and explore our training and support.



Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 summary – (enactment April 2019)

The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act will enable behaviours that constitute coercive control to be included in a new Section 1 Domestic Abuse offence. Under the new Act, it is an offence for someone to engage in a course of behaviour which is abusive to their partner or ex-partner, and which is likely to cause the (ex)partner physical or psychological harm. This includes fear, alarm and distress, and is either intended to cause their (ex)partner harm or the perpetrator is reckless as to whether it causes the (ex)partner to suffer harm.

Abusive behaviour is defined in two ways: a) behaving towards the (ex)partner in a violent(physically or sexually), threatening or intimidating manner or b) behaviour directed at their (ex)partner, at a child of their (ex)partner or at another person, which either has as its purpose or would be considered by a reasonable person to be likely to have any of the relevant effects listed below (Section 2):

- Making the victim-survivor dependent on or subordinate to them
- Isolating the victim-survivor from friends, relatives or other sources of support
- Controlling, regulating or monitoring the victim-survivors' day-to-day activities
- Depriving or restricting the victim-survivors' freedom of action
- Frightening, humiliating, degrading or punishing the victim-survivor

In relation to children, under Section 5 of the Act, the Section 1 offence is aggravated if at any time:

- Behaviour is directed at a child (N.B. can be any child, including neighbours, friends, etc.)
- A child is made use of in directing behaviour towards the victim-survivor (as above)
- A child sees, hears or is present during an incident of behaviour that is directed towards the victim-survivor as part of the course of behaviour, or that a reasonable person would consider the course of behaviour, or an incident that forms part of the course of behaviour, to be likely to adversely affect a child usually residing with the perpetrator or the victim-survivor.

Many of the DASH RIC questions relate directly to behaviours that would constitute coercive control. Professionals must consider the presence of controlling behaviours when completing the DASH RIC and note any behaviours - however subtle - that may be being used to isolate, monitor, degrade the victim-survivor, or restrict their space for action. Consider the cumulative effect of these behaviours and their impact on the person experiencing them and on the whole family.

You can use the final section of the checklist to record observations around this. This information should inform your overall professional judgement of the risks to and needs of the victim-survivor, and subsequent safety planning. This is known as a structured professional judgement approach to risk identification.

Information on the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 legislation can be accessed at legislation.gov.uk.

Guidance on how to use DASH



The Purpose of DASH

The purpose of the DASH RIC is to provide a consistent and simple tool for practitioners who work with adult victim-survivors of domestic abuse (experienced in the last three months or using professional judgement) to help them identify those who are at high risk of serious harm or homicide because of domestic abuse. Cases assessed at high risk should be referred to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to manage the risk. If you are concerned about the risk to a child or children, you should make a referral to ensure that a full assessment of their safety and welfare is made. This should not replace your local arrangements for submitting a child concern or child protection referral. Consult your local Child Protection Guidance.

Local and National Services

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 services to refer the victim-survivor to, including specialist services. The following contact details may be useful to you, but bear in mind there will possibly be local services that offer similar support.

National Support Services:

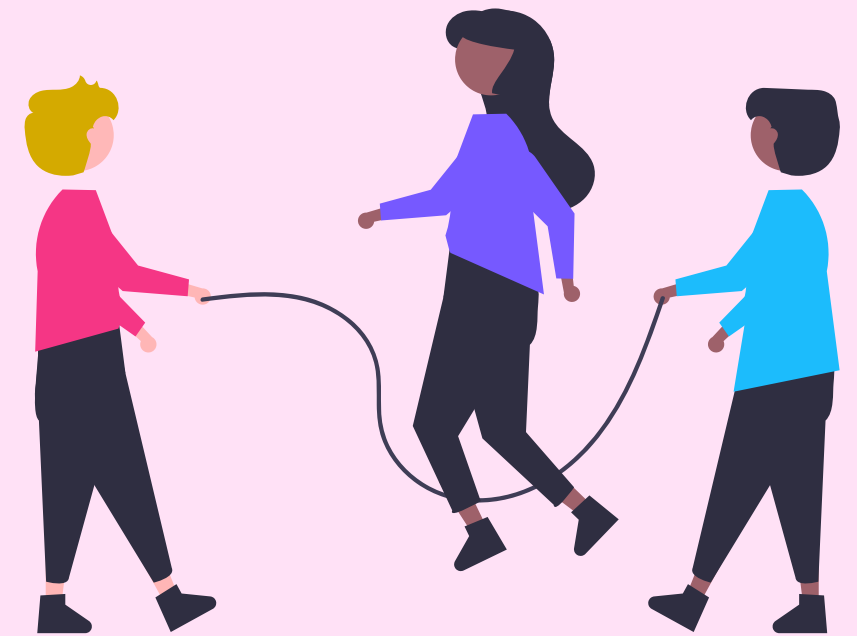
- Scottish Domestic Abuse & Forced Marriage Helpline: 0800 027 1234 (24 hours)
- Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327
- Rape Crisis Scotland: 08088 01 03 02 (every day, 6pm to 12 midnight)
- Scottish Women's Rights Centre: 08088 010 789 (Tues 6-9pm; Wed 1.30-4.30pm; Fri 10am-1pm)
- Samaritans: 116 123 (24 hours)

What this form is not designed for...

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 abuse, 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. This is particularly relevant to the Section 5 aggravation introduced through the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018.

The form should not be used with known perpetrators of domestic abuse who may be accessing your service. If you are concerned that a perpetrator is presenting to your service as a "victim", you should discuss with your manager and take appropriate steps to ensure that this does not increase risk to other service users and that you respond accordingly.

You may find it helpful to refer to the [Full Practice Guidance](#) for DASH that was developed to support new users of the tool.



DASH RIC Do's and Don'ts



The DASH RIC should be introduced to the victim-survivor within the framework of your agencies:

- Confidentiality policy
- Information sharing policy and protocols
- Local MARAC referral policies and protocols
- Guidance on GDPR and Data Protection requirements. [The Information Commissioner's Office in Scotland](#) has further information on GDPR and Data Protection.

You must be aware of your local MARAC processes, how to make a referral, who your MARAC agency representative is and how to contact the local MARAC Coordinator. These will be specific to your locality.

It is also important to have information to hand on local support services that you can share with the victim if they choose to access appropriate support services in their local area.

While you are asking the questions in the DASH RIC:

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

Before you begin to ask the questions in the DASH RIC:

- Establish how much time the victim-survivor 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 keeping them and their children safe.
- Explain there are 24 questions to answer, and that you will record the answers in the victim-survivor's own words.
- Tell the victim-survivor that they can choose to stop the risk assessment at any time if they feel distressed or upset.
- Explain that you will let them know whether you will be sharing information with relevant partner agencies, who they are and what information you will share.
- Explain that there may be a need to discuss their situation with a range of partner agencies at a multi-agency meeting called a MARAC. This will ensure that everyone involved will be aware of the risks and help increase their safety.

Revealing the results of the Dash risk checklist to the victim-survivor:

Telling someone that they are at high risk of serious harm or homicide because of domestic abuse may be frightening and overwhelming for them to hear.

You must state what your concerns are by using the answers they gave to you and your professional judgment. It is then important that you follow your local area's protocols when referring to MARAC and Children's Social Work 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 murder and serious harm and that if s/he experiences any of them in future, they should get back in touch with your service or with the emergency services on 999 in an immediate crisis.

Asking About Types of Abuse and Risk Factors

Physical Abuse

Questions 1, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19 and 23 of the DASH RIC ask about physical abuse.

- Physical abuse can take many forms – from a push or shove to a punch, use of weapons, choking or strangulation.
- You should try to establish if the abuse is getting worse, or happening more often, or if 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 to 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 the household, such as their children, siblings or elderly relatives.
- Sometimes violence will be used against a family pet.
- If an incident has just occurred, the victim-survivor can call 999 for assistance from the police.
- If the victim-survivor has injuries, try to engage them with a health service so that the injuries can be treated and documented, such as a GP or A&E nurse.



Physical Abuse

Sexual Abuse

Coercion, threats and intimidation

Emotional abuse and isolation

Children and pregnancy

Economic abuse

Sexual Abuse

We ask about whether the victim-survivor 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-survivor has suffered sexual abuse, you should encourage them to get medical attention and to report this to the police. Find a Sexual Assault Referral Centre nearby 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-survivors in relation to what the perpetrator/s may do; whom they are frightened of and whom they are frightened for (e.g. children/siblings/pets). Victim-survivors usually know the abuser's behaviour better than anyone else, which is why this question is significant.
- In cases of so-called "honour"-based abuse, 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, such as the mother-in-law.
- Stalking and harassment can become more significant when the abuser is also making threats to harm themselves, the victim-survivor 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-survivor's home or workplace, loitering and destroying/vandalising property.
- Advise the victim-survivor 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-survivor has tried to separate from the abuser or has been threatened about the consequences of leaving. Being pursued after separation can be particularly dangerous.
- Victim-survivors of domestic abuse sometimes tell us that the perpetrator harms pets, damages 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 increased risk of future violence.
- Some victim-survivors feel frightened and intimidated by the criminal history of their (ex)partner. It is important to remember that offenders with a history of violence are at increased risk of harming their (ex)partner, even if the past violence was not directed towards intimate partners or family members, except for so-called "honour"-based abuse, 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 victim-survivors can blame themselves and, to live with what is happening, minimise and deny how serious it is. As a professional, you can assist the victim-survivor in beginning to consider the risks the victim-survivor and any children may be facing.

- The victim-survivor may be being prevented from seeing family or friends, from creating any support networks or from having access to any money.
- Victim-survivors of so-called "honour" based abuse 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, victim-survivors feel like they have no choice but to continue living with the person and fear what may happen if they try to leave. This can often have an impact on the victim-survivors' mental health, and they might feel depressed or even suicidal.
- Equally, the risk to the victim-survivor is greater if their (ex)partner has mental health problems such as depression and if they use drugs or alcohol. This can increase the level of isolation as victim-survivors 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; if they have children, they may worry that they will be removed. These risks are addressed in questions 21 & 22.
- Consider that some of the emotional abuse and isolation experienced by victim-survivors could be constituted as coercive control, under the new legislation in Scotland.

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. Children 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-survivor and children, including an unborn child.
- The perpetrator may use the children to have access to the victim-survivor, abusive incidents may occur during child contact visits, or there may be a lot of fear and anxiety that the children may be harmed.
- Follow your local Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for identifying and making referrals to Children's Social Work Services.



Economic abuse

Economic abuse is covered in question 20.

- Victim-survivors of domestic abuse often tell us that they are financially controlled by their (ex)partner. Consider how the financial control impacts the safety options available to them. For example, they may rely on their (ex)partner for an income or do not have access to benefits in their own right. The victim-survivor might feel like the situation has become worse since their (ex)partner lost their job.
- The [Citizens Advice Scotland](#) or the local specialist domestic abuse support service will be able to outline to the victim-survivor the options relating to their current financial situation and how they might be able to access funds individually.



SafeLives delivers 'Risk assessment for domestic abuse training' in Scotland, on our DASH risk checklist, which is designed to strengthen knowledge of how to assess risk within domestic abuse cases.

[Find out more information about this training course from the SafeLives website here.](#)