

Guidance for Friends and Family

*Supporting loved ones
experiencing domestic abuse*

“ I wasn’t aware
she was being
abused. ”

“ I didn’t really speak
about it, but I knew it
wasn’t normal. ”

“ I didn’t know what
coercive control was. ”

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When you're in an abusive relationship, your whole world revolves around the abuser. Everything you think, say and do has the abuser's feelings and reactions in mind – But subconsciously. You're slowly programmed to just know what to do, by a gut feeling- it's not always an active thought.

A night out with friends? I wouldn't even ask if I could go or think about going. I just knew to decline. This leaves you totally co-dependent on the abuser, coming out of the relationship can feel so much worse than being in it because you don't know who you are or how to function without them. Something as simple as doing a food shop feels impossible because you don't know where to even begin. Everything I did was with my abuser, he decided everything inside and outside of my home from the food we bought to the clothes I wore.

- A Buckinghamshire victim

If you require this leaflet in an alternative format or language, please email bucksdap@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, s1 as follows: Behaviour of a person ('A') towards another person ('B') is domestic abuse if A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional or other abuse

It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.



What is controlling and coercive control?

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.

Honour Based Violence (HBV) and Forced Marriage

Honour based violence/abuse is a violent crime or incident which may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family or community.

A forced marriage is one that is carried out without the consent of both people. This is very different to an arranged marriage, which both people will have agreed to.



1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.



The police receive a domestic abuse related call every 30 seconds. Yet it is estimated that less than 24% of domestic abuse crime is reported to the police.



41% of UK girls aged 14 to 17 in an intimate relationship experienced some form of sexual violence from their partner.

What are the signs someone may be a victim?

If you're worried a friend or family member is being abused, let them know you've noticed something is wrong. They might not be ready to confide but try to find somewhere safe and quiet where they feel comfortable to talk to you.

Visible/hidden physical injuries

- You may notice that the victim has bruises, cuts, burns, bite marks, or other injuries. When questioned about these they may minimise these injuries and use implausible excuses as to how they happened. They may put off getting medical attention.
- You may notice the victim is wearing clothes to hide any injury marks, you may notice that their clothes seem inappropriate for the season or for an occasion – for example, they may wear a scarf/roll neck jumper on a summer day.
- It is important to note that there may not be physical injuries at all. Coercive control is extremely dangerous, and in many cases, there may not be physical abuse but control and jealous surveillance.

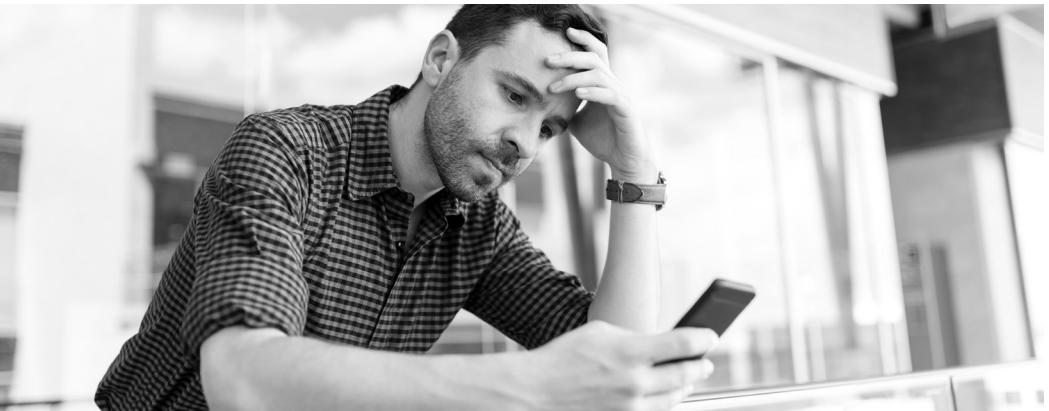


Abuser and victim dynamics

- You may notice the abuser says things which are mean, cruel or hurtful, to belittle the victim. Abusers often criticise victims, make fun of their opinions, beliefs, or appearance, say disrespectful things about them, or call them nasty names, often if challenged passing any comments off as a joke.
- They may act jealous or possessive of their victim, either overtly in front of people or in a way only privy to the victim, e.g. personal text messages and phone calls, noticing changes in demeanour and behaviour of the victim can help detect this.
- You notice the victim changes their behaviour around the abuser and become withdrawn, uncomfortable and emotional. They may constantly attempt to appease their abuser for fear of consequences.
- You may sense a power imbalance where the abuser appears to assert their dominance and demonstrate behaviour that shows their control over their partner. The abuser may gaslight their victim and make them question themselves.
- The victim may not be able to do things alone, always being accompanied by the abuser, including when it is inappropriate such as personal doctors' appointments.

Creating and maintaining distance

- The victim appears increasingly isolated. They may make excuses to not attend family occasions or social gatherings. You may sense their whereabouts are being controlled.
- The victim may be 'less themselves' and more withdrawn. A shadow of their former selves in terms of what would usually make them happy or laugh. Quieter and more insular, less likely to visit and check in.



Change of behaviour

- The victim may be obsessed with time, change the way they dress and must check in with the abuser via calls/texts. They may need to seek permission to do something or go somewhere. Not doing this may result in consequences from their abuser.
- The victim may not be able to spend money in the same way they did before. They may be given an allowance or not have any money at all as it gets paid into the abuser's account. Alternatively, they may have sudden money worries and debt due to being forced to take out loans. This may be because of financial abuse via their abuser.
- A job the victim was previously dedicated and passionate about will take less of a priority. They may be missing targets, less diligent and may be having a lot of sick days. In some cases, the abuser will encourage the victim to give up their job to spend more time at home. This may also be the case with study at college/university
- Alternatively, they may throw themselves into work, become workaholics and potentially appear very successful in their career, as that is the only place where they can be free from their abusers.
- They may lose confidence in themselves, being unable to make decisions about the simplest of things and deferring to the point of view of the abuser.

- The victim may withdraw from hobbies or clubs.
- The victim may appear to no longer care about themselves, with personal care or the way they dress. This becomes especially obvious and alarming where the victim was previously also well-presented and 'put together'.

Behaviour of abuser to others

- The abuser may appear overly friendly and charming. It may be hard to envisage the individual harming your friend or family member because of the public image they are portraying. They use this charm on professionals too.
- The abuser may project a caring nature with charitable qualities, often talking highly of themselves and the charity work they do, making it harder for outsiders to perceive them as a perpetrator of abuse.
- The abuser may encourage you to take part in belittling your friend or family member or get you to condone their unhealthy and abusive behaviour.
- The abuser may position themselves between the victim and others, family or friends, by being overly familiar in order to discredit the claims of abuse.
- The abuser may share very detailed 'sad' stories about their life with anyone they meet, especially those close to the victim, to gain sympathy, making it even more difficult for others to believe they could be an abuser.
- The abuser may show anger towards you as you may be questioning how healthy the relationship is and 'taking the victim' away from them.
- The abuser's main goal often is to isolate the victim from their support network, making it easier for them to assert power and control over the victim.

How can I help?

If you are told by a family member or friend that they are experiencing domestic abuse, take it seriously, listen and support them. Coercive and controlling relationships are the most dangerous. Frequently when homicides have occurred, no injuries have resulted in the relationship until the final act. By minimising or dismissing their disclosure you risk them staying with the perpetrator for longer as they feel the relationship can't be 'that bad'.

Useful tips

- Talking is the first step to healing.
- Listen, and take care not to blame them. It is the abuser who is entirely at fault. Never ask, 'why don't you just leave' or say, 'I've never seen it'.
- Believe what they're telling you.
- Acknowledge it takes strength to talk to someone about experiencing abuse.
- Give them time to talk, but don't push them to talk if they don't want to.
- Acknowledge they're in a frightening and difficult situation.
- Tell them nobody deserves to be threatened or beaten, despite what the abuser has said.
- Encourage them to express their feelings and allow them to make their own decisions.
- Don't pressure them to leave the relationship if they're not ready – that's their decision.
- Ask if they have suffered physical harm – if so, offer to go with them to a hospital or GP.

- Help them report the assault to the police if they wish to.
- If your family or friend is preparing to leave the relationship, **this is the most dangerous time** (it increases risk), have a safety plan in place between you in case of emergency. Encourage them to talk to local specialist services and their employer so they have the support they need and can make informed decisions.
- Have support service information to hand: see local services information.



IF YOU BELIEVE THERE IS AN IMMEDIATE RISK OF HARM TO SOMEONE, OR IT IS AN EMERGENCY, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS CALL 999.

What not to do or say

- Avoid asking 'why' questions, as they can come across as blaming or dismissive. Listen to them and show you support them.
- Don't rush the conversation or force solutions. The victim knows their abuser best and has been keeping themselves (and their children) safe up to this point.
- Don't offer excuses for the abuser. There is **no excuse for domestic abuse**. Validate their feelings and thank them for trusting you.
- Don't offer to talk to the abuser. It may make the situation worse and escalate risk.

Remember:

With the right help and understanding, healing is possible.

What services are available?



Local support for female victims

Women's Aid listens to and supports female victims of domestic abuse and provides free information, emotional support and access to safe temporary accommodation.

Aylesbury Women's Aid
01296 437777
aylesburywomensaid.org.uk

Wycombe Women's Aid
01494 461367
wycombewomensaid.org.uk

Local support for male victims

Free, confidential and non-judgemental support for the male survivors of sexual assault and domestic abuse.

Support After Assault and Abuse for Men (SAM)
01296 392468 / 01908 201971
support@saproject.org.uk
saproject.org.uk

Support for all genders and LGBTQ+ victims

The Sexual Assault and Abuse Support Service Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes supports male and female victims (incl LGBTQ+) of sexual assault and domestic abuse who are over 16.

Sexual Assault & Abuse Support Service

01296 392468 (if you do not get a reply, leave a voicemail and someone will call you back)
saassbmk.org.uk

Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Service South Bucks provides support to all genders aged 16 years old plus in Wycombe, South Buckinghamshire and surrounding areas.

Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Service South Bucks

0800 8100 679
office@rsass.uk.com

For children, young people and families

SASH is a partnership project providing support to children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse or sexual harm. This project brings together specialist and established services from SAASSBMK and SAFE!

SASH are able to support children and young people aged 5 to 18 years by delivering a responsive, individually tailored specialist support service in Buckinghamshire to those who have been affected by rape, sexual assault, and domestic abuse.

Support After Abuse and Sexual Harm Bucks

07546 561186
sashbucks.org.uk

For older victims

Hourglass is a specialist older persons' Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) Service. The service will initially provide six sessions to each client, usually delivered over the phone, more sessions can be delivered if required. Hourglass supports individuals aged 60 or over who are at risk of harm from a partner, ex-partner or family member, or individual is in recovery following harm.

Hourglass

Community Response Service 24/7 helpline: 0808 808 8141
wearehourglass.org

For victims of stalking

Aurora New Dawn can support with cases of stalking.

Aurora New Dawn

02392479254
stalking.thamesvalley@aurorand.org.uk

Report a concern

If you have concerns related to a child, please follow the advice via the 'report a concern' page on the BSCB website:
buckssafeguarding.org.uk

If you have concerns about an adult, please follow the advice via the 'report a concern' page on the BSAB website:
buckssafeguarding.org.uk

For more information and advice please visit bucksdap.org.uk

National support

National Domestic Abuse Helpline	0808 802 9999 nationaldahelpline.org.uk	National helpline
Women's Aid	0808 200 0247 womensaid.org.uk	National helpline
Samaritans	116 123 samaritans.org.uk	National helpline
Rape Crisis	0808 802 9999 rapecrisis.org.uk	National helpline
Men's Advice Line	0808 801 0327 mensadviceline.org.uk	National helpline for men
Mankind	01823 334244 mankind.org.uk	National helpline for men
Galop	0800 999 5428 galop.org.uk	Lesbian and gay helpline
DV Assist	0800 195 8699 dvassist.org.uk	Assistance with legal problems
National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV)	0800 970 2070 ncdv.org.uk	Assistance with legal problems
Karma Nirvana	0800 5999 247 karmanirvana.org.uk	Honour based abuse helpline
National Stalking Helpline	0808 802 0300 stalkinghelpline.org	Harassment or stalking advice
Respect Phone-line	0808 802 4040 respectphoneline.org.uk	For perpetrators

Toolkit

Being aware of domestic abuse support schemes is a great way to support those disclosing to you, especially those who are considering leaving relationship. It is important to not pressure victims into making decisions. Listening, believing and supporting them is the biggest source of comfort.

Clare's Law (Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme)

Clare's Law gives any member of the public the right to ask the police if their partner may pose a risk to them. This scheme also allows a member of the public to make an enquiry into the partner of a close friend or family member.



National Centre for Domestic Violence

National Centre for Domestic Violence offers a free, fast support service for victims to seek an emergency injunction: e.g. non-molestation order, occupation order, prohibited steps order.

Call 0800 970 2070 or visit ncdv.org.uk

Sanctuary Scheme

This scheme works with victims and survivors of domestic abuse to provide appropriate security measures in homes to ensure the victim's safety and peace of mind. The scheme strives to create a safer, more secure living environment.

For further information, please contact the Community Services team at Wycombe Women's Aid on 01494 449922.

For fireproof letterboxes, please refer to Bucks Fire and Rescue by contacting Central Admin at CentralAdmin@bucksfire.gov.uk

Hollie Guard

Hollie Guard is a next-generation smartphone app that provides enhanced levels of protection. Hollie Guard can be used when someone is working alone, travelling to an unknown area or simply commuting around town. With Hollie Guard, you can set extra levels of protection from right inside the App. The 24/7 monitoring service provides direct access to a dedicated emergency response team who are fully equipped to assess the individual's situation and are trained in the appropriate escalation process.

For more information by visit: hollieguard.co.uk

Pet Fostering - Dogs Trust Freedom Project

A free and confidential dog fostering service for people fleeing domestic abuse and going into refuge or other emergency accommodation. Dogs are cared for by volunteer foster carers for an average of 6-9 months until they can be reunited.

Call 0800 298 9199 Monday – Friday 9.00 to 17.00

Email freedomproject@dogstrust.org.uk

Visit dogstrustfreedomproject.org.uk

Pet Fostering - Lifeline

A free and confidential cat fostering service for people fleeing domestic abuse and going into refuge or other emergency accommodation. Cats are cared for by volunteer foster carers for an average of 6-9 months until they can be reunited.

Call 0345 260 1280 Monday – Friday 9.00 – 17.00

Email lifelinesoutheast@cats.org.uk

Visit cats.org.uk/what-we-do/cp-lifeline