

## DOMESTIC ABUSE FRONTLINE PROFESSIONALS FACTSHEET

### Getting it right first time: top tips for professionals

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Those who are experiencing domestic abuse or who are vulnerable to experiencing domestic abuse have a right to be safe and protected from harm.

All practitioners whose work brings them into contact with children and families should:

- Be professionally curious
- Look for the child and be their lockdown lifeline
- Be alert to the signs of abuse
- Know where to signpost if a family need to ask for help
- Be able to make referrals to the relevant agencies (e.g children's social care or to the police) if you suspect that an adult or child is at risk of harm or is in danger

In practice, here are the things you can do to protect those people who are at risk:

- **Be professionally curious**  
If something doesn't feel right, it usually isn't. It means looking, listening, asking direct questions, checking out and reflecting on information received. It means not taking a single source of information and accepting it at face value
- **Look for the child and be their lockdown lifeline**  
You may be the only professional a child/young person living in an abusive household has contact with at this time. Make that contact count – follow the normal safeguarding referrals routes – agencies such as the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) are still open and ready to support those families and individuals who need help
- **Be alert to the signs of abuse**  
The following list of signs of behaviour for adult victims is not exhaustive and should not be used as a definitive list, but should be used as guidance:
  - Has unexplained bruises or injuries
  - Shows signs of feeling suicidal
  - Becomes unusually quiet or withdrawn
  - Has panic attacks
  - Has frequent absences from work or other commitments
  - Wears clothes that conceal even on warm days
  - Is anxious about being out or rushes away
  - May never be seen alone, and is always accompanied by their partner
  - May become more isolated, possibly moving away from home, withdrawing from friends and family
  - Receive frequent, harassing phone calls from their partner
  - May have unexplained injuries, and may give other reasons for the injuries which refer to them being accidental



Younger children who experience and witness domestic abuse may:

- Become aggressive
- Display anti-social behaviour
- Become anxious
- Complain of tummy aches and start to wet the bed
- Find it difficult to sleep, have temper tantrums and start to behave as if they are much younger than they are
- Find it difficult to separate from their abused parent when they start nursery or school
- Be clingy, have behavioural difficulties, may be tired and lethargic, and struggle in social settings and at school

Older children/young people who experience and witness domestic abuse react differently:

- Boys seem to express their distress much more outwardly, for example by becoming aggressive and disobedient. Sometimes, they start to use violence to try and solve problems, and may copy the behaviour they see within the family
- Older boys may play truant and start to use alcohol or drugs (both of which are a common way of trying to block out disturbing experiences and memories)
- Girls are more likely to keep their distress inside. They may become withdrawn from other people, and become anxious or depressed
- Girls may think badly of themselves and complain of vague physical symptoms. They are more likely to have an eating disorder, or to harm themselves by taking overdoses or cutting themselves

### **Take action**

You must act if someone discloses abuse to you or you suspect abuse.

Based on what you have seen and heard, make a professional judgment about what you should do next.

If you identify or recognise the above, be professionally supportive, inquisitive and take the following action:

- If the victim or other vulnerable person is in immediate risk of harm this **MUST** be reported immediately - dial 999
- Safeguard the victim and any children (discreetly and not in the presence of their suspected abuser)
- Explain to the victim your priority is to make them and any other vulnerable people safe. Establish:
  - Their name, date of birth, address, contact details
  - Who are they at risk from – gather as much detail as possible about the offender name, date of birth, where they are now, are they known to police?
  - Details of what has happened.

- Whether there is anyone else living in the same dwelling e.g. children. Again full details if possible: name, date of birth and are they also at risk from the offender?
- Does the victim already have a plan or suitable options to make themselves safe?
- Will the victim will tell the police? (Discreetly and not in the presence of their suspected abuser):

If yes:

Arrange for the victim to speak to the police on 101, explain the circumstances and arrange to meet a police officer in a safe place (police station or other agreed location)

If no:

Explain you cannot ignore what you have been told or seen and will have to report the matter yourself.

**If the victim is adamant that they do not want the police involved:**

- a) Do they have a safety plan e.g. go somewhere else to stay and what is it?
- b) Provide the victim with the agency support details listed overleaf,
- c) Make every effort to persuade the victim not to return to the premises where they are in danger,
- d) You MUST then call the police on 101 yourself and report all information you hold

**If there is immediate risk of danger**

If the situation is urgent – for example there are injuries or a risk of immediate harm, dial 999 and ask for the police. Additionally, once you have dialled 999, if children are at risk, you should call your local authority children’s services or follow your organisation’s child protection policy.

**If the situation is serious and the victim is scared and frightened, but there is no immediate risk of danger**

You should seek advice from your service manager or your service’s domestic abuse champion and follow your organisation’s safeguarding protocols.

**If the victim is not in immediate danger, but is scared or frightened, or unhappy in their relationship**

Ask them how you can help. Make sure the victim knows about sources of help and support, such as those listed below, as well as any local services, and encourage them to get in contact.

**Signposting for help and support**

For details of the help and support agencies in Lancashire, visit [www.noexcuseforabuse.co.uk](http://www.noexcuseforabuse.co.uk)

If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to someone, or it is an emergency, you should always dial 999.

### **If you are unsure what to do**

If you are unsure about what to do, speak to a local domestic violence service, the police or children's services for advice. They can suggest the right way forward and will speak initially on an anonymous basis.

### **Referrals**

You can also make references via the usual routes - the MASH and Children's Social Care. Alternatively, you signpost people to their local police safeguarding unit:

#### **West Division**

Blackpool and Fylde area – DI Jamie Lillystone/ DS Sarah Houldsworth  
Lancaster Area – DI Andy Ellis / DS Simon Balderstone

#### **South Division**

DI Chris Wellard  
DS Madeleine Rufus

#### **East BCU**

DI Victoria Caine  
DS Darren Irving

To contact the local police safeguarding Units please dial 101 and ask to speak to the relevant officer.

### **Reporting domestic abuse**

If you want to report a crime, but you are not in immediate danger, you can call the police on 101 or report online here: [lancashire.police.uk/reportcrime](http://lancashire.police.uk/reportcrime)

If you need the police in an emergency, please do not be afraid to dial 999 - they will help you and protect you from danger

### **LOCAL AUTHORITY COLLEAGUES**

If you work for a local authority, Lancashire Safeguarding Adults Board has created a domestic abuse guide to support practitioners and managers. [Click here to view the document.](#)

Remember:

- Never make decisions for people or advise them to leave their home or relationship. This may put them in danger
- Use your professional judgement – if you sense there's something wrong, you should act on it

- Be human and use everyday language - people may not see themselves as victims of domestic abuse. It's hard to talk about, so acknowledge that and thank them for being honest with you
- Make a record – make notes of what has been said to you, including the time, date and injuries, including as much detail as possible. Use the person's words wherever you can. Your professional judgement is also important. Write down what you think or feel about the situation and why
- Act on it - it took a lot of courage for the victim to tell you. Don't keep what you know to yourself. The victim and family need you to help them get help