

No. 38 Domestic Abuse

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse (DA) is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship, including other family members and carers. It can seriously harm children and young people and witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse. It's important to remember domestic abuse:

- can happen inside and outside the home
- can happen over the phone, on the internet and on social networking sites
- can happen in any relationship and can continue even after the relationship has ended
- both men and women can be abused or abusers.

Types of domestic abuse

DA can be emotional, physical, sexual, financial or psychological, such as:

- kicking, hitting, punching or cutting
- rape (including in a relationship)
- controlling someone's finances by withholding money or stopping someone earning
- controlling behaviour, like telling someone where they can go and what they can wear
- not letting someone leave the house
- reading emails, text messages or letters
- threatening to kill someone or harm them
- threatening to another family member or pet

Effects of domestic abuse

It can be difficult to tell if DA is happening and those carrying out the abuse can act very different when other people are around. Children and young people might also feel frightened and confused, keeping the abuse to themselves. Living in a home where DA happens can have a serious impact on a child or young person's mental and physical wellbeing, as well as their behaviour, and this can last into adulthood. Therapeutic support should be provided for children who have experienced this type of abuse.

Signs that a child has witnessed DA can include:

- aggression or bullying
- anti-social behaviour, like vandalism
- anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts
- attention needing
- bed-wetting, nightmares or insomnia
- constant or regular sickness, like colds, headaches and mouth ulcers
- drug or alcohol use
- eating disorders
- problems in school or trouble learning
- tantrums
- withdrawal

Countries coming out of a period of 'lockdown' for their citizens are reporting a huge rise in the number of DA incidents, it is expected that we will see the same here in the UK. If a child or parent reports to you that they have experienced or witnessed DA, either in their home, or in their close neighbourhood, it is important that you take the report seriously and know how to report the concern and seek the right support for the victim and the child or children involved.

Reporting and support for the family:

If you are worried about the immediate safety of a person you should dial 999.

If you are worried that there has been a DA incident and you do not think that the police are aware (i.e. you have not had an Operation Encompass call or a police ViST) you should report this to the police on 101 or complete the online reporting form. This also applies to third party reports of DA, such as for neighbours or acquaintances of the person who has disclosed the concern of DA to you.

If the victim of DA is in a position to act protectively and keep themselves and their children safe from the perpetrator of DA, it is appropriate to offer Early Help support to ensure that agencies are involved who can support the victim in keeping their family safe, and to ensure that the family can access any therapeutic support that is needed. Due to the complexities of DA this is not usually a straightforward process and the victim may not be able to act protectively or engage with any support that is offered. Where this is the case, and you are worried about an ongoing situation which is impacting on the children in the home, it is proportionate to make a MASH enquiry so that Children's Social Care can decide whether an assessment of the situation is warranted. Due to the nature of DA you may not be able to reach the victim or have a 'safe' conversation with them to gain consent for a MASH enquiry, this should not prevent you from making your MASH enquiry if you feel that children are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm, as is the case when they are experiencing DA.

Support for victims of DA in Devon is offered by Splitz, the victim can self-refer to this service or you can refer for them with their consent, professional's referral form available on the website. For Torbay or Plymouth families, support is offered through Sanctuary Supported Living.

Useful Contacts/Support:

Emergency Services/Police phone 999 – Police non-emergency 101
Police online reporting form <https://services.devon-cornwall.police.uk/crimereporting/>

www.splitz.org - Devon Helpdesk 0345 1551074

www.sanctuary-supported-living.co.uk/our-services/domestic-abuse

Plymouth & Torbay: Plymouth 0800 458 2558 or Torbay 0800 916 1474

Samaritans at 116 123 (samaritans.org.uk)

National Domestic Violence Helpline 24hr – 0808 2000 247

Survivors Trust Helpline at 0808 801 0818 (thesurvivorstrust.org)

Relate 0300 003 0396

For Children

www.childline.org.uk/ online support or telephone 0800 1111

<http://thehideout.org.uk/>

More resources on help supporting children available on NSPCC website below.

More information:

www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/domestic-abuse

www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/