



daha

Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance

Overview

This policy sets out how RLA members can take steps to assist and support any tenant threatened with or experiencing domestic violence or abuse if they wish to do so. You are not under any legal obligation to do so. However, the RLA encourages members to take domestic abuse seriously, not to ignore potential signs and to provide a sensitive and confidential response to anyone approaching you for assistance in cases of domestic abuse.

Not defined in statute but the following is a working cross-government definition of domestic abuse and violence:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- *psychological (including coercive and controlling behaviour)*
- *physical*
- *sexual*
- *financial*
- *emotional*

We ask that members consider:

- If a history of domestic abuse is disclosed at the beginning of a tenancy to offer additional security measures. A Sanctuary Scheme is a multi-agency victim centred initiative which aims to enable households at risk of violence to remain safely in their homes by installing extra security and support to the household. Examples of some measures that can be offered include new door locks, security locks, window locks and door viewer.
- Include at tenancy sign up information on the local domestic abuse services available in addition to the National Domestic Violence Helpline Number 0808 2000247 (24 hours 7 days a week www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk)
- Ensure that tenants know they can contact you in confidence and in different ways.
- If approached by a tenant who may be experiencing domestic abuse encourage them to access appropriate support.
- If you feel comfortable doing so and with the consent of the tenant share information with Agencies that would be able to help the tenant such as the police and domestic abuse support services.
- Provide improved security to a tenant's home where a need is identified and take advice from police and the local authority (e.g. security lights, window and door locks) Funding may be available and it could only be your consent that is required for the works to be carried out
- If approached by a tenant who may be experiencing domestic abuse encourage them to access appropriate services as early as possible and check that they are given specialist advice to allow them to make informed choices about what to do next. It is possible for your tenant to stay in the property with the correct legal sanctions in place and it is important that you as landlord are kept informed so that the best decision for all parties can be made. It is not always necessary for the tenant to move as a result of domestic abuse if the right support is given.
- Ensure that where children and young people are affected or you suspect they are being affected by domestic abuse that you seek appropriate help and advice and refer into services such as Children's Social Services teams.
- If there is an imminent risk or a suspected imminent risk to your tenants' safety or welfare or a family member residing at the property then phone 999.

We ask that members publicise this approach to raise awareness amongst other landlords with the aim of improving the response to domestic abuse and violence in the Private Rented Sector. All parties have a role to play in this, especially housing providers across all tenures.

Definitions of abuse

Physical Abuse

This could include: hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing or shoving, cutting or stabbing, restraining, strangulation and finally murder.

Sexual abuse

This could include rape and coerced sex, forcing a victim to take part in unwanted sexual acts, refusal to practice safe sex or use contraception, threatened or actual sexual abuse of children.

Financial abuse

This could include: controlling money or bank accounts, making a victim account for all expenditure, running up debt in a victim's name, allowing no say on how monies are spent, refusing them to allow to study or work.

Psychological and Emotional Violence and Abuse

This can have a profound impact upon victims and children. It can leave a victim with little confidence that they can do anything to change the situation. Examples include:

- Creating isolation e.g. not allowing them to see other people, preventing them from making their own friendships, not allowing them to go anywhere on their own, causing them to feel bad about themselves and then using this against them.
- Use of threats e.g. threats to kill their family, children, friends, pets, to throw them out of the house and keep the children, to find them if they ever leave, to have them arrested and locked up, to tell everyone that they are 'mad'.
- Putting them down e.g. humiliating and undermining them in front of others and their children, telling them they are stupid, hopeless, unlovable, that no one would believe them or they are a bad parent.

Controlling behaviour

A range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependant by isolating them from their 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

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. It includes forced marriage or so called 'honour violence'.

A suggested approach

Responding to a report of domestic abuse

On receiving a report of domestic abuse directly from a tenant, offer to call the police with their consent or to call another body that will be able to help such as a local domestic abuse support service. It is recognised that this is a very sensitive area and one that private landlords cannot just impose without the tenant's consent. As the landlord *you are not legally obliged to report domestic abuse* but this is always something you should consider and make some response.

The minimum response should be that the tenant is provided with local domestic abuse services and the number for the National Domestic Violence Helpline (0808 2000247) which is available 24 hours a day. This helpline also provides advice to anyone and would be able to provide you as landlord the information on local services which you could then pass on to your tenant. If you are concerned and think there may be an imminent risk even if the perpetrator has left the property phone the police.

Further follow up action

The landlord or agent can if they wish, ensure that contact is maintained with the tenant until they feel that support is no longer required. Please be assured that you as a private landlord are not expected to carry out the role of a victim support officer, but sensitively supporting your tenant and them having the confidence to be able to keep in touch with you can avoid future problems.

Where possible assist and support the tenant to stay in their home and sustain their tenancy. In some circumstances the victim may feel unable to return to their home either in the immediate or long term – for example if the perpetrator stays in the locality.

If the tenant cannot return, their support worker (IDVA) will be able to assist them to access alternative housing and you should be kept fully informed of this. If you can, try to be flexible in terms of contractual arrangements and consider the practicalities of accepting a surrendered tenancy where this is appropriate and it is not safe for the tenant to continue to reside in the tenancy. Legal advice should always be sought in these circumstances.

Damage to and security of the property

We ask that RLA members will give full consideration to:

- Allowing permission for additional security measures to be installed. This is usually via the police and/or local authority and can be critical to allow a tenant to stay in their home and sustain their tenancy. Always agree with the tenant who will maintain such items.
- Any damage to the property as a result of domestic abuse should be noted and photographed and wherever feasible charged to the perpetrator. Where appropriate the landlord or agent may seek to take direct action against the perpetrator and report the damage to the police as a crime.
- Work with the tenant and support services if the tenant wishes to have an abusive partner removed from a tenancy agreement. There will be joint legal obligations here to fulfil and it is essential to seek legal advice if this is seen as the preferred option moving forward. Your tenant may give you notice to quit if on a rolling periodic tenancy and request a sole tenancy when the joint tenancy ends. Always get this in writing. Find out if the tenant has sought advice before accepting the notice – the tenant will need to consider the implications of sustaining the tenancy on their own which includes the financial responsibility. Seek advice before making a decision and ensure that the tenant has sought advice from agencies that can advise on budgeting and potential financial assistance that they may be entitled to.

Economic Abuse

Abusers may interfere with a partner's ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources – including housing, this is known as economic abuse. For example, they may tell a landlord/agent not to 'bother' their partner or that their partner is not very good at dealing with these things and not to keep them informed about anything to do with the house or rent. At the very least do not take this on face value and always communicate with both tenants.

Multi Agency Approach

We ask that RLA members endeavour to work with all local agencies to ensure that your tenant is dealt with in the most effective way if the tenant wishes for you to be involved. Housing is seen as a key part of the coordinated community response and essentially should have regard to all housing tenures and not just social housing. Private Landlords and their agents have an important role to play in improving the response to domestic abuse and this policy is here to help you respond should you wish to.

Further information and support

National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline – 0808 2000 247. This helpline is run in partnership by Refuge and Women’s Aid and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
<http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk>

Victim Support – <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/>

Female victims – Women’s Aid <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/>

Male victims – MALE <http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk/about-us/>

For information and advice for children and young people, please visit the ChildLine website <http://www.childline.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx> or telephone ChildLine free on 0800 11 11.

Forced Marriage Unit <https://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage>

Respect Phone line which provides help and advice for perpetrators of domestic abuse or professionals working with perpetrators <http://www.respectphoneline.org.uk/>

Refuge, the national charity for women and children experiencing domestic violence
<http://www.refuge.org.uk/>

Co-ordinated Action Against **Domestic Abuse** (CAADA) which provides help and advice to organisations and professionals working with domestic abuse victims <http://www.caada.org.uk/>

Female victims and legal advice – <http://rightsofwomen.org.uk/>