

Guidance for the Private Landlords during COVID-19

The Government's stay at home advice in response to the Covid-19 pandemic can create new challenges for people experiencing domestic abuse. Lockdown measures and self-isolation for people living with domestic abuse in coercive or violent relationships means being trapped indoors with their abuser. Reports of domestic abuse as much as tripled in China during periods of isolation. And Refuge, who run the National DA Helpline reported in mid-April that they received a 25% increase calls since the lockdown began.

Landlords are uniquely placed to access people living with domestic abuse. You could be the first to know about domestic abuse either because the tenant reports this directly or it comes from a third party. You may also spot potential warning signs associated with domestic abuse such as unexplained damage to the property, requests for lock changes and repairs (damage to doors and locks, recurring repairs) and rent arrears.

Your response to domestic abuse is vital during these times of increased isolation. Focusing on the safety of the person experiencing and their children the abuse is paramount. We have produced some basic guidance on how you can respond safely and effectively to your tenants, who you know, or suspect is living with domestic abuse.

Spotting the signs

Domestic abuse is an incident or pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse. It can encompass, but is not limited to the following forms of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- economic
- emotional

Economic abuse may be amplified at this time and could be some of the first or only warning signs of abuse. Tenants may get in contact to discuss issues with paying the rent which could provide key opportunities for conversations or to [spot the signs of economic abuse](#).

Signs of domestic abuse include:

- presence of or increase in rent arrears, victim/survivors are four times more likely to receive an eviction notice due to rent arrears
- damage to the property
- repair call outs, particularly for door, window and kitchen damage and holes in walls
- requests for lock changes, enhanced security or replacement keys for front and bathroom doors
- noise nuisance complaints

- police callouts
- neighbours reporting concerns
- substance misuse
- tenants reporting money worries such as not having control over their money or being prevented from accessing financial support
- a sense that something isn't quite right

Your role – recognise abuse and signpost victim/survivors to specialist domestic abuse support

Many of the signs of domestic abuse can be misinterpreted as antisocial behaviour (ASB) or 'problem tenants'. **Responding to domestic abuse requires a different approach than the usual ASB route.** A key part of your role is to first identify whether domestic abuse may be a factor as this will then influence the next steps you take in order to ensure that the safety needs of the victim/survivor are not missed. For example, issues relating to ASB such as rent arrears, property damage and noise complaints are all reasons why a housing provider may seek to evict tenants. However, all these issues can be a manifestation or result of domestic abuse.

Identifying domestic abuse in the first instance may provide opportunities to help the victim/survivor and prevent them from becoming evicted (in the period following the COVID-19 lockdown) and made homeless due to the actions of the abuser.

Before speaking to tenants, familiarise yourself with the national domestic abuse services available, check what specialist services are being delivered in your local areas and let victim/survivors know, in a safe way, what specialist domestic abuse support is available.

If you know or suspect that someone is experiencing domestic abuse, it is recommended that you:

1. Find out if it is safe to have a conversation – people experiencing domestic abuse may be afraid that telling others will make their situation worse. It will not be safe for them to talk about what is happening if the abuser is in the room.

DAHA outline how to communicate safely in their [guidance](#) and have published Peabody's strategy for communication when domestic abuse is suspected [on their website](#).

2. Listen and acknowledge – people experiencing abuse often suffer in silence and may not recognise that what is happening to them is domestic abuse. This is because the abuser is likely to blame or gaslight the victim/survivor into thinking the abuse is

their fault. Acknowledge how hard it may have been for the person to speak to you about what's happening to them.

3. Validate the person's experience by telling them that you believe them and that the abuse is not their fault
4. Offer information on the specialist support services available (see directory of specialist domestic abuse services below)
5. If there are rent arrears, consider whether these may be a result of economic abuse and how you may be able to support the victim/survivor and safely hold the abuser to account. Debts can make a victim/survivor economically dependent on the abuser and prevent them from leaving.

Sanctuary Scheme

A Sanctuary Scheme involves securing a survivor's property to increase their safety. Under the current lock down restrictions it is vital that survivors remain safe in their homes. Works that can be carried out include additional locks, chains, latches and reinforcement of doors and windows. These measures are designed to be as unnoticeable as possible, are of no cost to the landlord and can even reduce the cost of your home insurance.¹

Different organisations dispense the scheme across different areas, and you may be asked by the Local Authority or whoever runs your local scheme to approve works on your property. You can help survivors by approving these works swiftly. More information about Sanctuary Schemes can be found [here](#).

Raising awareness when it is not safe to talk

You may suspect that domestic abuse is occurring but because the abuser is in close proximity, it may not be safe for the victim/survivor to speak to you. DAHA has produced a leaflet with a range of support services that are continuing to deliver services during COVID-19 and includes the number for the [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#), as well as other key national services such as services offering helplines for general housing needs advice, financial advice, food support and mental health support.

¹<https://www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/en/articles/home-insurance-how-to-get-the-best-deal>

This leaflet has been designed to be distributed to tenants to help raise awareness of the National Domestic Abuse Helpline. It is included amongst a range of generic, national services so that it is less likely to raise suspicions with the abuser.

Evictions and Rent

During this crisis there is also a shortage of suitable emergency accommodation for victim/survivors and their children, and for perpetrators so that they can leave the family home. You may have access to additional properties and could consider whether you can support a tenant to find accommodation.

Financial support such as dual housing benefit can help to pay for housing costs for a victim/survivor when there are two tenancies in place. See SEA's resource, [Finding a safe place to live](#), for more information.

The Government has announced a measures to protect renters, including legislation that suspends evictions within social and private rented accommodation for at least a 3 month period. As a result of these measures, no renters in private or social accommodation needs to be concerned about the threat of eviction.

Survivors may have experienced economic abuse, leaving them with limited funds to support themselves and possibly their family. The additional risk of losing their job or being furloughed at this time will increase this pressure. You may also be able to secure deferred mortgage payments, which you can use to assist survivors through deferring or reducing rent payments.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP

'These are extraordinary times and renters and landlords alike are of course worried about paying their rent and mortgage. Which is why we are urgently introducing emergency legislation to protect tenants in social and private accommodation from an eviction process being started...These changes will protect all renters and private landlords ensuring everyone gets the support they need at this very difficult time.'

Directory of specialist domestic abuse services

The [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) offers a **free 24-hour helpline – 0808 2000 247** – that can provide victim/survivors with emotional support and advice on their options. It is also the gateway to the national network of refuges available in England and can signpost you to your local domestic abuse services. They can also offer advice to professionals who are supporting victim/survivors.

The helpline is likely to be busier than usual as some areas in England already see increases in domestic abuse cases coming forward. An alternative to calling or if someone is struggling to get through, includes visiting www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk and filling in an online form, requesting a safe time to be called back. This online method of accessing support is especially important now when telephoning for help may be more difficult.

Victim/Survivors can also receive automated guidance via the **Refuge chatbot** on how to secure their devices <https://www.refuge.org.uk/our-work/our-services/tech-abuse-empowerment-service/>

Women's Aid

Where telephone support is not safe, Women's Aid have online services to support. This includes:

- **Online chat** chat.womensaid.org.uk/ (Mon–Fri, 10am–12pm)
- **Online resources** www.womensaid.org.uk/the-survivors-handbook/ (help on housing, safety planning, dealing with police and more)
- **Directory of services** www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory/
- **Online forum** survivorsforum.womensaid.org.uk/

GALOP

National LGBT+ domestic abuse helpline offering emotional and practical support for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse

0800 999 5428 (National)

020 7704 2040 (London)

Karma Nirvana

Advice and support for victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriage

0800 5999 247

Southall Black Sisters

Advice and support for black & minority ethnic women experiencing all forms of gender-related violence,

0208 571 0800 (Helpline)

0208 571 9595 (Enquiries)

Forced Marriage Unit

Government office providing information and advice for British nationals forced into marriage

020 7008 0151

020 7008 1500 (out of hours number)

[Respond](#)

Support for people with learning disabilities who have experienced trauma and/or abuse]

0808 808 0700

[Deafhope](#)

Domestic and sexual abuse support for the deaf community:

020 3947 2600 (Phone)

079 7035 0366 (Text)

[Men's Advice Line](#)

Support for male victims: 0808 801 0327

[Respect Phonenumber](#)

Support for male and female abusers to stop using abusive/violent behavior, and advice for staff working with abusers

0808 802 4040

[Childline](#)

Free 24-hour helpline for children in distress or danger

0800 1111

[Rights of Women](#)

A range of advice lines available for law advice including domestic abuse, child contact, sexual violence and the criminal justice process and immigration and asylum advice lines

Follow these links for more information on the support that Rights of Women can offer: [Family law](#); [Criminal law](#); [Immigration law](#); [Sexual harassment at work](#).

Other information and resources

Neighbourhood Watch have produced the following guide for community members on how they can help if they have concerns about someone living with domestic abuse.

www.ourwatch.org.uk/get-involved/help-and-advice/crime-prevention-toolkits/domestic-abuse/how-help

DAHA have collated a range of [useful information and resources](#) from other organisations and Government.

Surviving Economic Abuse have published a [series of resources](#) for women experiencing economic abuse (Tools to Thrive) and the professionals supporting them (Tools to Support). This includes resources about the COVID-19 outbreak.

For more information about responding to domestic abuse within the Private Rented Sector, see the [Whole Housing Approach Toolkit](#).