

## FACT SHEET

Applies to UK

JULY 2020

National Domestic Abuse Helpline:  
0808 2000 247

Run by Refuge and available 24  
hours a day, 365 days a year:  
[nationaldahelpline.org.uk](http://nationaldahelpline.org.uk)

In association with



Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance

[dahalliance.org.uk](http://dahalliance.org.uk)

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## Support for tenants threatened with or experiencing domestic violence or abuse

### CONTEXT

By the end of March 2019, an estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse in the last year (1.6 million women and 786,000 men). This is compounded with the private rented sector now accounting for nearly 20 per cent of all households in England and housing more families with children than social housing. It is therefore essential that letting agents have the awareness and confidence to respond appropriately and know the signs to look out for.

There's no legal requirement to act on or report domestic abuse. However, as a measure of good practice and to support agents and landlords to do so, this fact sheet has been produced to help develop a wider understanding of the issues along with advice on how to help a tenant who may be in need of support.

### WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

The current working definition used by government is '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.'

**NB: The abuse can encompass but is not limited to psychological (including coercive and controlling behaviour), physical, sexual, financial and emotional.**

### WHY AWARENESS IS IMPORTANT

Landlords or agents can sometimes be the first to spot the signs, either directly by disclosure from the tenant or indirectly by a third party such as the police. However, there can also be other indicators such as unexplained damage to the property, reports of loud noises, banging or shouting from neighbours.

Agents or landlords are not expected to be specialists or 'hands on' in the same way as a social housing landlord. However, you could have a significant impact and improve outcomes for victims/survivors.

**NB: The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) ask that agents publicise this approach to raise awareness amongst other landlords and agents with the aim of improving the response to domestic abuse and violence in the sector.**

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## WHAT SHOULD AGENTS CONSIDER?

At tenancy sign up, include information on local domestic abuse services available in addition to the National Domestic Violence Helpline Number 0808 2000 247 (24 hours 7 days a week [www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk)).

**NB: Ensure that tenants know they can contact agents in confidence.**

Provide improved security to a tenant's home where a need is identified and take appropriate advice from the Police and the local authority (e.g. security lights, additional window and door locks).

**NB: Funding may be available, and it could only be an owner's 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.

**NB: It is possible for the victim to stay in their property and for the perpetrator to be removed with the correct legal sanctions in place and it is important that you as an agent are kept informed so that the best decision for all parties can be made.**

It is not always necessary for a tenancy to end as a result of domestic abuse if the right support and coordinated response is given.

**NB: Housing is an integral part of the Coordinated Community Response to domestic abuse and it is becoming increasingly recognised the role that the PRS plays.**

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.

**NB: 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.**

## 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 murder.

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### 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.

### Economic abuse

When an abuser restricts how someone acquires, uses and maintains money and economic resources, such as accommodation, food, clothing and transportation. This can include stopping them from having money to pay their rent and bills, asking agents or landlords to withhold information such as arrears having been accumulated, taking debt out in their name and causing damage to the property. At the very least do not take this on face value and always communicate with both tenants.

### 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.

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### 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'.

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### Honour based abuse

An incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation coercion or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse) which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/ or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community's code of behaviour.

### WHAT AGENTS NEED TO DO – SUGGESTED APPROACH

Agents should take domestic abuse seriously, not to ignore potential signs and to provide a sensitive and confidential response to anyone who may approach agents for assistance where there is domestic abuse.

There is no legal requirement to act or report domestic abuse, however the consequences of ignoring a situation could be serious. Agents should:

- Take domestic abuse seriously and don't always think firstly that it's nuisance or antisocial behaviour
- Not ignore potential signs
- Respond and support any approach for assistance

### Responding to a report of domestic abuse

On receiving a report of domestic abuse directly from a tenant:

- Only speak to the them when they are alone and never in front of others because they may be the perpetrator or may tell the perpetrator
- 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
- Have a willingness to listen and hear what the person wants to happen
- Consider how you as an agent or landlord can use your powers to help, and how you can share information to all tenants at the time of sign up about national and local domestic abuse services.

**NB: It is recognised that this is a very sensitive area and one that agents and landlords cannot just intervene without the tenant's consent.**

Useful information and contact details you can provide to your tenants include the National Domestic Violence Helpline (0808 2000 247).

**NB: This helpline provides advice to anyone affected by domestic abuse and agents would be able to get vital information on local services which they could then pass on to the tenant. If agents are concerned and think there may be an imminent risk, even if the perpetrator has left the property phone the police.**

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### Further follow up action

Agents should ensure that contact is maintained with the tenant until all parties feel that support is no longer required.

**NB: Agents are not expected to carry out the role of a victim support officer, but sensitively supporting the tenant and them having the confidence to be able to keep in touch with agents 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 and if the tenant cannot return their IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) will be able to assist them to access alternative housing and agents should be kept fully informed of this.

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

Allowing permission or obtaining owner's permission for additional security measures to be installed where this is advised. 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 in the longer term.

Damage to the property as a result of domestic abuse should be noted and photographed and wherever feasible charged to the perpetrator. Where appropriate agents should 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.

**NB: The tenant may give 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 legal advice before making a decision.**

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## MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH

Housing is seen as a key part of a Coordinated Community Response. Landlords and agents have an important role to play in improving the response to domestic abuse. Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility and housing providers regardless of tenure are in a unique position to support and help tenants.

## IN SUMMARY:

- Call the police if you suspect there is an imminent risk to your tenant's safety
- Offer information on the domestic abuse services available at the start of every tenancy
- Don't ignore the signs
- Speak to victim/survivors on their own, ask them what they want to happen and how you can help
- Consider additional security/be aware of Sanctuary Schemes in your local area
- Look at tenancy issues that may arise through the wider lens of domestic abuse, don't just think antisocial behavior
- Consider tenancy contractual arrangement and tenancy sustainability of joint tenancy to sole tenancy

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Women's Aid: [womensaid.org.uk](http://womensaid.org.uk)

Male victims: [mensadviceline.org.uk/about-us](http://mensadviceline.org.uk/about-us)

LGBT+ victims: [www.galop.org.uk](http://www.galop.org.uk)

Children and young people: [childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk)

Victim Support: [victimsupport.org.uk](http://victimsupport.org.uk)

Respect phone line provides help and advice for perpetrators of domestic abuse or professionals working with perpetrators: [respectphoneline.org.uk](http://respectphoneline.org.uk)

Refuge the national charity for women and children experiencing domestic violence: [www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)

National Stalking Helpline offers advice and support for anyone experiencing stalking: [www.suzylamplugh.org](http://www.suzylamplugh.org)

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