

STANDING TOGETHER AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE

Domestic Abuse Guidance for Block Managers



**STANDING
TOGETHER**

against domestic abuse

May 2022

Contents

What is domestic abuse?

p.3

What can I do within my role as Block Manager?

p.4

1. Make it your business
2. Identify the signs of domestic abuse
3. Ask about the abuse...
4. ... and provide a safe response
5. Provide helpline and local support numbers
6. Ensure entry systems are always safe
7. Share this guidance and attend training
8. In an emergency

Domestic abuse helpline numbers

p.12

About this guidance

This guidance was developed by Standing Together and the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) to provide Block Managers of residential properties with information on how to identify the signs of domestic abuse, and advice on what they can do within their role to help residents experiencing domestic abuse.

This guidance does not assume that Block Managers should be experts in domestic abuse or provide in-depth support to people experiencing domestic abuse, but it recognises that they are in a unique position to identify key signs of domestic abuse, and provide a safe and effective response that is within their professional remit.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse refers to abusive behaviour between **people who are personally connected**, in most cases between **intimate partners, ex-partners or family members**.

Abusive behaviour includes any of the following:

- physical violence
- sexual abuse
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional or other abuse

Who can experience domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a serious and widespread crime that can affect anyone. In the majority of cases, it is experienced by women and perpetrated by men, but it's important to remember that **anyone can experience domestic abuse**, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, religion, class or background.

Individuals from minoritised communities, such as LGBTQ+ people, older people, disabled people, and individuals from Black, Asian, or other minority ethnic backgrounds are just as likely, and in some cases more likely, to experience domestic abuse but are less likely to access specialist services and support.

For more information about the forms of domestic abuse, please go to the Government's webpage on <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help>

A note on language

Throughout this guidance, we refer to people experiencing domestic abuse as victims or survivors, and people causing the abuse as perpetrators.

What can I do within my role as Block Manager?

1. Decide to make it your business

The first step is to acknowledge that domestic abuse is your business, because it is likely that **there will be people living in the buildings you manage who are experiencing domestic abuse.**

As a Block Manager, you are in a **unique position** to spot or be made aware of signs of domestic abuse, such as anti-social behaviour, or broken doors or windows. Your response and actions, even small, can be **life-saving**.

Domestic abuse is a hidden crime that thrives in silence. Every organisation and individual has a vital role to play to address and prevent it.

On average in England and Wales:



100 calls per hour

to the police are related to domestic abuse



2 women a week

are killed by their partner or ex-partner

What are the key signs of domestic abuse?

2. Identify the signs

As a residential Block Manager, you might notice signs yourself on site visits, or be made aware of key information by a contractor, landlord, managing agent or resident.

The key signs of domestic abuse that you might come across include:

- **Noise nuisance** such as shouting or arguments reported by neighbours
- **Anti-social behaviour**, such as noise complaints, aggressive behaviour, and alcohol or drug use by the perpetrator, or by the victim/survivor as a coping mechanism
- **Property damage and regular repairs**, in particular broken doors or smashed windows
- **Requests for lock change** including private and communal doors
- **Police call-outs**
- **Rent arrears**, often as a result of economic abuse from the perpetrator
- Signs of **physical abuse** such as bruises or injuries
- A sense that **something isn't quite right**, such as a resident who is not allowed to leave their property, or who looks frightened by someone in their household

A lot of these signs are the same as anti-social behaviour (ASB), and domestic abuse is often mistaken for ASB. If any of these signs are happening, it is vital to use a 'domestic abuse lens' and consider what you can do to help.

Look out for the signs of domestic abuse, and trust your gut instinct. If something doesn't feel quite right, there's probably more to it.

If you are concerned about someone

3. Ask about the abuse...

If you believe that someone may be experiencing domestic abuse, you should ask them about their situation. It is then up to them to decide whether to tell you, and that's ok.

It's important to make sure that the person is **alone** and **safe** before speaking to them about the abuse, especially when you are speaking over the phone. To first establish if they are safe to speak, ask closed questions which allow them to give 'yes' or 'no' answers, such as '**Are you alone?**', or '**Is it safe to speak with you right now about your relationship?**'

Many victims/survivors may find it difficult to share their experience of domestic abuse, because they may fear they won't be believed or they'll be at risk of further harm. It is our responsibility as professionals to identify people experiencing domestic abuse and offer support within the remit of our roles.

Here are some ways to show them that it is okay to talk with you about the abuse:

- 'I've received some noise complaints from the neighbours and wanted to check whether you are safe at home and if there is any way I can help you.'
- 'I've recently noticed some damage to the property and wanted to check whether you were safe and if there is any way I can help you.'
- 'You mentioned that you're scared of your partner/he won't let you leave the house/he's hurt(ing) you. Would you like to tell me more about that so that I can see if there is any way for me to help?'

How do I respond to a disclosure?

4. ...and provide a safe response

If a resident (or anyone) tells you they are experiencing domestic abuse to you, it is important to provide a safe and helpful response:

Do

- ✓ **Listen** to them without judgement: never blame them for the abuse
- ✓ **Believe** them
- ✓ **Validate** what they are telling you. For example '**this isn't your fault**', '**you are not alone**'
- ✓ Tell them that **support is available**, and give them contact details of specialist services (see contacts at the end of this guidance)

Don't

- ✗ Don't confront the abuser. This could increase the risk for the victim and their children.
- ✗ Don't contact the police or other services **unless** the victim asks you to, or if there is an immediate risk of harm (see 'In an emergency' section)

Recognising disclosures

It is possible that a resident may want to tell you about the abuse, however they may not say 'I am experiencing domestic abuse'. They might say things like:

- I don't feel safe at home
- I feel scared/frightened of my (ex) partner/family member
- My (ex) partner/family member won't let me leave the house
- My (ex) partner/family member is hurting me

Signposting to specialist services

5. Provide contacts for helplines or local domestic abuse services

If a resident tells you they are experiencing domestic abuse, give them the helpline numbers at the end of this guidance, or search for their local domestic abuse service.

The **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** run by Refuge is a free and confidential service open 24-hours. The number is **0808 2000 247**. Helpline workers are trained to respond to victims and any professional or third-party seeking advice about domestic abuse.

Each local authority commissions at least one domestic abuse service to support people locally. You can find a local service by searching on the local Council website, or googling 'domestic abuse service in [enter location]'.

Put notices in communal areas

Arrange for **information about domestic abuse helplines** to be displayed in communal areas. Refuge provides posters to print with the National Domestic Abuse Helpline number:

<https://www.refuge.org.uk/refuge-publications-2/posters-and-resources/>

You can also contact your local domestic abuse service to ask them for **leaflets or posters**.

Safe communal entry systems

6. Ensure that the building entry systems are always safe

You could have a resident in your building who has left an abusive relationship, but their ex-partner or family member might know their address and try to continue the abuse.

Make sure that the communal entry systems are always working, and are as safe as possible. This can include:

- Providing a **video entry system** where possible
- **External lights** for residents to see who is trying to enter the building
- **Prioritising repairs** to the intercom system or any communal doors

If you are aware of a resident experiencing domestic abuse, ask them if they would like any changes to communal doors.

You can also ask them if they'd like you to speak to their landlord or a domestic abuse service about security measures to their individual property.



Remember that a forced or damaged door could be a sign of domestic abuse.



Raising awareness

7. Share this guidance and attend a domestic abuse awareness course

There is not enough awareness of domestic abuse in the property management sector, so help spread the word by sharing this guidance with your colleagues and networks.

Speak to your **contractors** and other staff working in your residential buildings such as **concierge, gardeners or cleaners**. Anyone coming to contact with people's homes might come across signs of domestic abuse. Making it everyone's business will save lives.

Consider attending a domestic abuse awareness course by contacting your Council or local domestic abuse service, or contact Standing Together for bespoke training.



In an emergency

Call for help

If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to the victim, children, perpetrator or anyone else in the household, encourage them to **call 999 immediately**.

If you can't get in contact with them, or if they are unable to call the police when there is an immediate risk of harm, get as much information as you can regarding their current location and contact details and then call 999 to report the concern.

The Police has a **Silent Solution System** when you can't speak: **call 999 and press 55** when prompted. If you can speak to the victim safely, inform them of this.

Safeguarding children

If you think children are at risk of harm, this is a safeguarding concern. You do not have a statutory duty to safeguard children, but the government strongly advises that safeguarding is everybody's business.

If you have any concerns that there are children who may be at risk of harm you can seek advice by calling your Council's **Children Safeguarding Team**, or the **Childline** free helpline on 0800 1111.

Domestic abuse helplines

National Domestic Abuse Helplines - Freephone 24-hour:

- England: 0808 2000 247 (run by Refuge)
- Northern Ireland: 0808 802 1414
- Scotland: 0800 027 1234
- Wales: 0808 8010 800

Women's Aid live chat service: <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>

Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327 (for men experiencing domestic abuse)

Respect: 0808 802 4040

(for anyone worried that they may be harming someone else)

Galop: 0800 999 5428

(for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people experiencing domestic abuse)

Forced Marriage Unit: 0207 008 0151

Karma Nirvana: 0800 5999 247

(for anyone at risk of so called 'honour-based abuse')

National Stalking Helpline: 0808 802 0300

Rights of Women: 020 7251 6577 (free legal advice for women)

Women's Aid directory of services:

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-directory/>