

Private Rented Sector (PRS) Domestic Abuse Good Practice Guide

Domestic abuse is a hidden crime that takes place behind closed doors. **Costly damage, multiple voids** and the **time** spent unintentionally managing abuse related issues can all be **mitigated** through awareness, efficient practices, and the early adoption of safe responses.

On average in England and Wales:

- **2 women a week are killed** by their partner or ex-partner
- **70%** of them are **murdered in the home**
- the Police take **100 calls per hour** related to domestic abuse

Letting Agents, Landlords and **Block Managers** are often the **first** to be aware of potential indicators and patterns of domestic abuse which can present itself as:

- Noise nuisance complaints involving shouting and screaming
- Rent arrears, potentially due to no or limited access to money
- Failure to allow access for inspections & essential works such as gas safety checks
- Damage to the property potentially caused by violent conduct
- Locks on the outside of bedroom doors or broken bathroom door locks
- Contact from Domestic Abuse Support Organisations, Police or Environmental Health



Standing Together is a national charity bringing communities together to end domestic abuse. Our model of a Coordinated Community Response (CCR), a coordinated local partnership to tackle and ultimately prevent domestic abuse, is now widely accepted as best practice. We deliver training to a range of professionals, including criminal justice partners, police, health professionals, housing associations, MARACs, social services, local authorities and faith groups.



Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance

In 2014 Standing Together cofounded DAHA, the **Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance**, to improve the housing sector's response to Domestic Abuse.

For more information see: www.dahalliance.org.uk

Recognising Domestic Abuse

What domestic abuse is, the signs that you may see, and the manipulation techniques used by perpetrators:

'**Domestic**' means belonging or relating to the **home, house, or family**. This includes carers, children, former and current partners, all any age or gender. '**Abuse**' is an event or pattern of insidious incidents of coercive, controlling, degrading, threatening and violent (inc. sexual violence) behaviours. Domestic Abuse happens to, or perpetrated by people regardless of their profession, income, appearance, age, achievements, skin colour, education, gender, or location. Without awareness, safe responses and access to support, a **fatality** or **suicide event** is more likely to occur before safety can be achieved.

Perpetrators intentionally leave victims with little confidence or the capacity to change their situation by using some or all of the following methods which constitute Domestic Abuse:

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.' Abuse from more than one perpetrator is not uncommon.

Economic 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, controlling or withholding rent payments, refusing them to allow to study or work.

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.

Psychological and Emotional Violence abuse techniques include (but not limited to):

- **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. stalking, 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, telling people 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, that no one would believe them or they are a bad parent.

Respond Safely & Appropriately

Residential Lettings Agents and Landlords should not at any point try to **intervene, reason, disclose information or resolve domestic abuse issues with the perpetrator**. The safety of the person at risk relies on your confidentiality. In the event of an emergency, contact the Police by calling 999.

Where domestic abuse is suspected or if a tenant contacts you to discuss a concern, you should speak to them only when safe to do so. Many people experiencing domestic abuse do not identify or recognize that they are a victim.

Any contact can be legitimately regarded as routine and allows for creativity as to why you may need to contact them using these five steps:

- **Step 1:** Establish if it is safe to talk, Is the person alone?
- **Step 2:** Reassure them that this conversation is confidential
- **Step 3:** Ask an introductory question to open a conversation
- **Step 4:** Follow this up with a direct question about the abuse. Examples include:

"We are here to help. Is there anything we can do to help you feel safe in your home?"

"Do you ever feel frightened of a partner or family member?"

"Has anyone tried to injure or control you in any way?"

- **Step 5:** Validate the customers experiences. Examples include:

"This is not your fault", "I believe you" and always ask "What can I do to help"

Disclosures

Some victims might not be ready to disclose abuse when you ask. They may respond dismissively or defensively due to fear, or the many barriers faced by people experiencing abuse. Still validate them, let them know that support is available, and encourage them to keep the lines of communication open.

If the survivor feels able to disclose domestic abuse, ask them what they need or want to happen. **Listen** and **avoid making judgements** about the situation or telling them what to do. Reassure them that support is available, and it is a positive step to talk about it. If they are unable to complete the conversation, ask how and when is the safest way to contact them.

Residential Lettings Agents and Landlords should **confidentially** and factually document:

- Any observed signs of domestic abuse
- A record of any disclosures of domestic abuse & action taken regarding the issue
- Details of any support services or agencies that the tenant has been referred to or is already involved with

This documentation can then be used as **evidence** in the event of a **homicide or suicide**.

Hand SOS - Signal for Help

If you or your contractors notice a trap thumb hand signal in any setting or situation, it is a universal non-verbal and discreet **signal for help** from abuse and for someone to reach out to them safely.



Refer: Sanctuary Scheme and Support Services

A **Sanctuary Scheme** is a safeguarding Police Crime Prevention Initiative that improves the security of the home and immediate surroundings. These are installed **free of charge** to deter unauthorized entry and prevent harmful access to those at risk.



This could include:

- Lock Changes (a new key will be provided to the Landlord/Agent)
- Improved door security
- Window lock upgrades
- Doorbell Camera
- Exterior Sensor Lighting (house)

Security improvements are fully **reversible** by the installer upon completion of tenancy, if requested. The scheme is approved by the **National Fire & Rescue services** to ensure all door, window and building additions **meet current Fire Regulations** for any type of building.

The Sanctuary Scheme is only appropriate **if the perpetrator is no longer residing in the property**. The Agent and the Landlord have the right to refuse, however Environmental Health or the Police may eventually enforce security measures.

Consent for the Sanctuary provider to assess the property may come from the Police, Independent Domestic Violence Advisor, or a Support Agency. Their recommendations require further consent from the landlord and a **delay** in obtaining approval can have **life changing consequences**.

If the **perpetrator is still residing in the property against the victims wishes**, the victim should be signposted to a domestic abuse service for advice and support to consider legal options, including a potential Occupation Order.

Support services



When appropriate, advise people experiencing abuse to contact the freephone **National Domestic Abuse Helpline open 24/7 on 0808 2000 247** to access specialist support.



Further information and local specialist support services can be accessed via the **Bright Sky website** www.hestia.org/brightsky and **App**

Once referred, the support response for survivors of domestic abuse is **entirely** led by their needs and unique set of circumstances. A coordinated network of local specialist services and statutory agencies can address safety, prevention, crisis, risk, bringing the perpetrators to account and the survivors long term recovery.

Earlier identification, crime prevention and self-referrals can all be achieved by visibly incorporating the National Domestic Abuse Helpline contact number on **key tenancy documents and webpages**. Engaging with specialist services and their advocates helps to reduce the risk, impact, delay and costs associated with domestic abuse.

DAHA PRS Domestic Abuse Accreditation

Landlords & Letting Agencies can now upskill and implement a leading model of best practice and awareness with our pioneering **DAHA PRS Domestic Abuse Accreditation**.

DAHA (The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) are the leading specialist domestic abuse organisation, supporting housing providers to improve their responses through accreditation and training since 2014

The CPD certified **DAHA PRS Domestic Abuse Accreditation eLearning** can safeguard your business and tenants against the risks and cost associated with instances of domestic abuse:

- Mitigate the time & costs incurred by domestic abuse related damages and Anti-Social Behaviour incidents
- Provide a clear framework for private Landlords and Agents to safely recognise, respond and refer instances of domestic abuse
- Understand how to conduct difficult conversations safely, understand abusive behaviours and enhance key communication skills
- Identifies approved PRS Agents & Landlords who comply with a recognised scheme of domestic abuse specific safety standards
- Increase the number of sustained tenancies and minimise void/reletting periods
- Use a recognised domestic abuse accreditation kitemark as a crime prevention measure and potential deterrent for perpetrator applicants

If you interested in finding out more about our PRS Accreditation, please contact us on WHA_team@standingtogether.org.uk

