

Responding to Domestic Abuse in the Private Rented Sector

A guidance for Environmental Health teams in Local Authorities

Why do Environmental Health professionals need to know about domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a widespread crime that takes place **at home, behind closed doors**. Any professional with access to people's homes is in a **unique position** to recognise signs of domestic abuse, such as damage to the property, or a feeling that something isn't quite right when meeting the residents.

Unlike social housing, tenants in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) do not have support from a housing officer. Environmental Health practitioners might be **the only professionals** in contact with private tenants when carrying out home inspections. Their role is not to intervene directly, but it is vital that they **identify the signs and pass on their concerns** to the appropriate specialist team within the local authority.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is **abusive behaviour** between people who are "**personally connected**", most often between intimate partners or ex-partners, or family members. It can include:

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

You can read the full statutory definition in the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#).

Key stats

On average in England and Wales:

- The Police take **100 calls per hour** related to domestic abuse
- **Two women a week** are killed by their partner or ex-partner
- **75%** of them are murdered **in the home**
- **750,000 children** are exposed to domestic abuse every year

Who is at risk?

Domestic abuse is a **gendered crime**: women are disproportionately victims/survivors, and men are disproportionately perpetrators. However, women can also be perpetrators and men victims, and men are less likely to seek support. It is important to remember that **anyone can experience domestic abuse**, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, religion, class or background, and marginalised groups face more barriers to access support.

Children who live in a household with domestic abuse are recognised as **victims** in their own right.

Implementing DAHA good practice standards in the PRS

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) standards are recognised as good practice standards for housing providers and local authorities to respond effectively to domestic abuse. All teams within local authorities have **safeguarding responsibilities** to protect people impacted by domestic abuse and their children in any tenure type. The Private Rented Sector (PRS) in particular is housing an increasing number of vulnerable people who are isolated from statutory support.

Environmental Health teams are therefore in a **unique position** to identify domestic abuse in the PRS, and should implement the following actions, in line with the DAHA framework for local authorities.

Domestic abuse policies

- All staff need to be aware of the local authority's domestic abuse policies. If there is no authority-wide domestic abuse policy in place, this should be discussed with the Domestic Abuse or Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Lead.
- The policies should set out the local authority's commitment to respond to domestic abuse affecting both **staff and residents**.

Domestic abuse procedures

- Environmental Health teams need to have tailored procedures for staff to respond to domestic abuse. The procedures should provide practical guidance tailored to specific roles including public-facing staff as well as managers.
- The procedures should include how staff **record and flag** any concerns of domestic abuse in a property, and who to **refer** their concerns to.

Training

- All public-facing staff and their managers need to access **domestic abuse awareness training**.
- Training should include understanding the impact of domestic abuse on victims/survivors, and how to recognise the signs in a housing setting. This includes understanding the links between domestic abuse and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), property damage and rent arrears.

Referral pathway

- Environmental health teams need to set up a **referral pathway** with the most appropriate **specialist team** leading on domestic abuse in the local authority. Depending on the local authority structure, this might be a domestic abuse team within the housing department, a stand-alone domestic abuse team, or a domestic abuse hub sitting across different teams.
- There needs to be an agreement in place for Environmental Health officers to pass on concerns **confidentially**, most often without the victim/survivor's knowledge or consent, so that specialist staff who are trained to respond to domestic abuse can take appropriate action.

Sanctuary Schemes

- Sanctuary Schemes are an intervention to secure a survivor's property once the perpetrator no longer lives there.
- If a private landlord initially refuses the safety installations, we recommend that the Environmental Health team asks the landlord to reconsider in order to protect the property from the 'entry by intruders' hazard in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).
- This needs to be done in coordination with the **specialist domestic abuse service** supporting the victim/survivor.

Addressing domestic abuse in home visits

Environmental Health Officers who carry out home visits should follow the 4 R's method: **Recognise, Respond, Record, Refer**. These steps should be reflected in the domestic abuse procedures tailored to each role.

1. Recognise

All staff need to attend training to recognise the signs of domestic abuse in the home or from contact with residents. This includes:

- **Damage to the property** such as broken doors or locks, punch marks in the wall, broken furniture
- **Anti-Social Behaviour** and **noise nuisance** reported by neighbours such as shouting or arguing
- **Rent arrears**
- A sense that **something isn't quite right** such as unexplained injuries, or someone looking frightened



2. Respond

You should not intervene directly with residents, even if you suspect that someone is at risk of domestic abuse. However if someone tells you that they are being abused, offer a safe and supportive response:

- Tell them that you **believe them** and that **help is available**
- Consider who can hear your conversation, never use friends or family for translation
- If safe to do so, give them the **National Domestic Abuse helpline 0808 2000 247**, or the **local domestic abuse service** contact. You can find local services on the Bright Sky directory: <https://uk.bright-sky.org/en/home>
- Never confront the abuser(s). If there is an immediate danger, call the police on 999



3. Record

- Record any **signs or concerns** you identified during your home visit
- Add a **safety flag or alert** on your case management system if available
- Record any relevant information discussed with the potential victim/survivor(s) and perpetrator(s)
- Record **any actions** you have taken, such as discussing with your manager and referring to a specialist domestic abuse team.



4. Refer

- If you identified signs of domestic abuse, discuss your concerns with your manager
- Agree on what actions to take. If there are any concerns, you should make a referral to the **specialist domestic abuse team** within the local authority
- Follow your local authority **safeguarding policy** if you think a child is at risk of harm
- You **do not require consent** to make a domestic abuse or safeguarding referral



Contact

Standing Together created this guidance as part of the Whole Housing Approach project, to help Environmental Health teams in local authorities to identify and respond to domestic abuse in the remit of their role, while carrying out property inspections in the Private Rented Sector (PRS).

For further information about our work in the Private Rented Sector, please visit our [website](#) or contact us on Wha_team@standingtogether.org.uk



Standing Together is a national charity bringing communities together to end domestic abuse, using the Coordinated Community Response (CCR) model. We support organisations to identify and respond effectively to domestic abuse so that survivors receive the best possible support to live free from abuse.



daha

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 through an accreditation and recognised standards of good practice. For more information see: www.dahalliance.org.uk



Whole Housing
Domestic Abuse

In 2018, Standing Together and DAHA established the '**Whole Housing Approach**' to domestic abuse, a framework for local authorities to improve access to safe and stable housing for survivors of domestic abuse in any housing tenure type.

Further support

National Domestic Abuse Helplines 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)

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)