



What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse can be:

- Controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour
- Violence
- Psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse between adults over 16 years old who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members

It can include behaviour such as:

- Deprivation of food and sleep
- Actual or threat of physical harm
- Verbal or sexual threats
- Emotional blackmail
- Isolation from friends and family
- Imprisonment in your home
- Using your children against you
- Forced marriage
- Honour-based abuse

It can be difficult to talk to other people about domestic abuse. If you are living with domestic abuse or know someone who is, remember:

- The fault lies with the abuser
- No one has to suffer alone
- Help and support are available
- You don't have to leave the relationship to seek help
- Recognise what is happening to you
- Accept that you are not to blame
- Take control back
- Seek help and report it

But many people live with it without realising because they don't understand what it means.

Control

Anyone over 16 years old can experience domestic abuse and it's not always partners involved – family members can be abusive too.

Domestic abuse is not just about physical violence, it is often more about controlling behaviour such as limiting or withholding money or emotional or psychological abuse. Whatever forms it takes, domestic abuse is never acceptable and the victim is never to blame.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten.

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support.

Substance abuse and mental health issues are sometimes viewed as a cause of domestic abuse, but there's no excuse. If you or anyone you know are living with these issues or would like to talk to someone about how you feel then we would encourage you to seek help.

Coercive and controlling behaviour

The Government's coercive or controlling behaviour offence will mean victims who experience the type of behaviour that stops short of serious physical violence, but amounts to extreme psychological and emotional abuse, can bring their perpetrators to justice.

The offence carries a maximum of 5 years' imprisonment, a fine or both.

The coercive or controlling behaviour offence will protect victims who would otherwise be subjected to sustained patterns of abuse that can lead to total control of their lives by the perpetrator.

Coercive or controlling behaviour does not relate to a single incident, it is a purposeful pattern of incidents that occur over time in order for one individual to exert power, control or coercion over another.

The offence aims to close a gap in the law around patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour during a relationship between intimate partners, former partners who still live together, or family members.

This sends a clear message that it is wrong to violate the trust of those closest to you, providing better protection to victims experiencing continuous abuse and allowing for earlier identification, intervention and prevention.

Common behaviours

There's no set pattern to domestic abuse and it's impossible to generalise, but there are common behaviours linking abusive relationships.

There are people who can help so noticing these behaviours is the first step towards a life beyond abuse.

Below we've listed a few common behaviours to help you recognise domestic abuse but it's important to remember that each situation is unique.

- Destructive criticism, name calling, mocking, making accusations.
- Disconnecting the telephone or monitoring or blocking calls.
- Making it difficult for you to leave the house or contact friends, by taking the car away for example.
- Lying to you and your family and friends about you.
- Stopping you seeing family and friends or checking up on you.
- Physical violence, e.g., punching, burning, kicking, pulling hair, slapping.
- Sexual violence e.g., forcing you to perform sexual acts or to look at pornographic material.
- Making you feel you are to blame for causing the abusive behaviour.
- Making threats.

The national Women's Aid charity has put together an online questionnaire to help women recognise domestic abuse, which may be useful to you.