

WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**BASIC GUIDELINES FOR ALL
FRONTLINE STAFF**



**METROPOLITAN
POLICE**

Working together for a safer London



This brief guide is intended as a reference for people who may come into contact with survivors of domestic violence but who may not necessarily be trained specialists in this field. They may have approached your service about another matter such as housing or child-care and have in the course of the conversation disclosed domestic violence.

Specialist domestic violence workers are experienced and receive thorough training in order to safely advise and support victims. Non-specialists should not be expected to give this kind of advice but it is important to be aware of services that survivors can access and how to refer to these. Safety of the survivor should be the number one priority and actions taken or advice given can have an impact on this.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

The government's core definition of domestic violence is

'any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality' (2nd London Domestic Violence Strategy Nov 05)

The definition incorporates issues such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so called 'honour' killings, as well as elder abuse when committed within the family or by an intimate partner.

Some people prefer to use the term 'survivor' to describe someone who has experienced domestic abuse while others prefer 'victim' and the two terms have been used interchangeably throughout this leaflet.

Perpetrators use a pattern of controlling and aggressive behaviour to exhibit power over their victims. As well as physical violence this may include behaviours such as:-

- **Isolation** - Controlling where victims go and who they can see
- **Humiliation** - putting them down and causing low self esteem
- **Intimidation** - by looks, gestures, words, destroying property
- **Using coercion and threats** - eg. about children or family pets
- **Economic abuse** - controlling/withholding money

Domestic abuse has a devastating effect on survivors and their families in terms of their physical, mental and emotional well being and the

trauma experienced can have far reaching effects for many years afterwards.

WHO DOES THIS AFFECT?

Domestic violence occurs in all communities and across all socio-economic groups. There is often a misconception that domestic violence always involves men being violent to women. Although this is more prevalent, women can also be perpetrators. Domestic violence occurs in lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender relationships and may involve family members including children and siblings.

Research has suggested that as many as 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience domestic violence during their lifetime.

Children are affected by domestic violence even if they do not witness it first hand. Children living in homes where domestic violence is occurring may be in the room next door and hear the violence or they may see their parent's injuries following an incidence of violence. They may also suffer deprivation and disruptions to their family and social life as a consequence of controlling behaviours. From 31 January 2005, Section 120 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 came into force, which extends the legal definition of harming children to include harm suffered by seeing or hearing ill treatment of others, especially in the home.

WHAT FACTORS MIGHT INCREASE THE RISK OF VIOLENCE?

- Attempting to leave the partner – research has demonstrated that people are at highest risk of violence when attempting to leave their partner or when they have recently left them
- Pregnancy or recent birth of a child – violence is more likely to begin or escalate during pregnancy or shortly after birth
- Social isolation as a result of language barriers or other factors such as disabilities – people who are socially isolated are at higher risk of escalating violence particularly if they cannot access help due to language difficulties or because they have no recourse to public funds
- Stalking / sexual assault – if the perpetrator's levels of violence are increasing or they have subjected their victim to sexual assault or stalking, the risk is very high and the perpetrator is likely to be far more dangerous
- Substance Misuse - drug and alcohol use is **never** a cause of or

excuse for domestic violence, however perpetrators may become more physically violent and the risk to the victim may increase. Survivors who have substance misuse issues may be less able to access help and support, increasing their vulnerability.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

There are various steps that can be taken to protect people who are experiencing domestic violence both under criminal and civil law and referral to a specialist worker (see below) will ensure that these options can be explained and support can be given. They will also be able to give practical advice around issues such as housing and money.

As well as giving emotional support and advice, specialist domestic violence workers can do a risk assessment and help to devise a 'safety plan' with the survivor. This is extremely important where the victim is considered to be high risk.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Listen: Take time to listen and believe their story – survivors are far more likely to underplay their abuse than exaggerate it.

Support: Confirm that the abuse is not acceptable and that help is available

Act: Take action if the survivor wants and consents to getting some help, and refer to appropriate services (see below). This may be the first, only or last time they disclose the abuse to someone. You can ring up for advice if you are unsure what to do

Ensure safety: If they are thinking of leaving their partner, ensure they have access to professional support and advice around safety planning as the risk of violence may increase

Safe contact: If the victim wishes to have further contact with you, agree a safe method that cannot be traced by the perpetrator. They may be checking phone records, e-mails or browsing histories. Do not attempt to contact the perpetrator or discuss the abuse with them present.

REMEMBER THAT SAFETY OF THE SURVIVOR AND THEIR CHILDREN SHOULD BE THE NUMBER ONE CONCERN. ADVISE THEM TO DIAL 999 IF THEY ARE EVER IN IMMEDIATE DANGER

FIRST POINTS OF CONTACT:

Domestic Violence One Stop Shop:

Mondays 9.30am to 12.30pm at the Baptist Church, Union Street Kingston, KT1 1RP (Tel: 07917 271 549 for info)

A drop-in service offering confidential advice and support to anyone who has experienced domestic violence. Agencies that attend include Victim Support, Police, solicitors, Kaleidoscope, Citizens Advice Bureau, Islamic Resource Centre and Hestia Floating Support.

Community Safety Unit: Tel: 020 8247 5165.

This is the department in Kingston police station that deals with domestic violence incidents and is open 7 days a week

ASKK (Advancing service for Kingston Kids): Tel: 020 8547 5888

for information and advice about children's services or if you think a child may be vulnerable

OTHER SERVICES IN KINGSTON:

Safeguarding services: Tel: 020 8547 6587

If you are worried a child is being hurt, abused or is at risk

Hestia Floating Support Service: Tel: 020 8786 2128 / 07967 271 278

Provide confidential practical and emotional support to women living in Kingston who are experiencing domestic violence

Victim Support Kingston: Tel: 020 8547 3202

Victim support is an independent charity for people affected by crime. Trained volunteers offer confidential emotional and practical support and advocacy regardless of whether or not the victim wishes to report the crime

Kingston Women's Refuge: Tel: 020 8390 8431 Bhavan: 020 8399 3640

Provide temporary safe and supported accommodation for vulnerable women and their children fleeing domestic violence. For safety reasons Kingston residents should access refuge beds outside of the borough via the National Helpline (below)

Homelessness Assessment team: Tel: 020 8547 5460

Open weekdays 8.45am – 5pm (closes 4.45pm Friday)

Out of hours emergency no: 020 8770 5000 Provides advice and assistance to people who are homeless or are threatened with homelessness

Sanctuary Scheme: Tel: 020 8547 5440 Enables victims of domestic violence to remain safely in their own homes if they would prefer to do so by fitting security measures and providing additional support

NATIONAL HELPLINES:

National Domestic Violence Helpline: 0808 2000 247

(helpline run by Women's aid and Refuge offering confidential support and information to women who have experienced domestic abuse)

Men's advice line: 0808 801 0327

(advice line for men experiencing domestic abuse from their partner)

Broken Rainbow: 08452 60 44 60 (helpline for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people who have experienced domestic violence)

National Centre for Domestic Violence: 08709 220704 (24 hour helpline offering free legal advice and injunctions within 24 hours)

Rights of Women: 020 7251 6577

Free legal advice line run by women for women

Respect: 0845 122 8609 (Information and advice line for people who are abusive towards their partners or professionals working with them)

This guide is not intended to be exhaustive and further information can be found on the RBK website which also has details of other useful websites and the Kingston Directory of Domestic Violence services:

http://www.kingston.gov.uk/community_people_and_living/crime/domestic_violence.htm

For further information and leaflets on domestic violence services in Kingston or details of domestic violence training please contact

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