



SOS save refugees,
save lives

women's aid
until women & children are safe

This domestic violence toolkit aims to support MPs and their constituency offices in recognising and supporting constituents who may be experiencing domestic violence or are survivors of domestic violence.

The toolkit will help you to understand domestic violence, recognise some of the signs of domestic violence and know where to refer women victims of domestic violence so they can get further help and support.

It does not cover all issues but should hopefully help you support your constituents.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Two women are killed every week in England and Wales by a partner or ex-partner, around 1.2 million experience domestic violence every year. At this moment there will be hundreds, if not thousands, of women and their children in your constituency experiencing domestic violence.

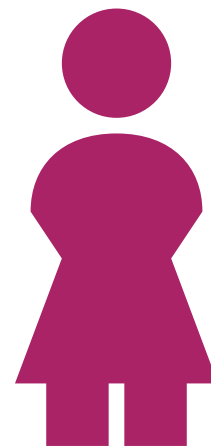
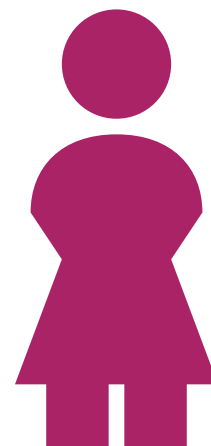
Domestic violence cuts through all parts of society and can affect anyone regardless of their gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, lifestyle or religion.

The current cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Women are vastly more likely to be the victims of domestic violence perpetrated by men. 89% of individuals who have experienced four or more incidents of domestic violence are women.



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DO YOU KNOW THE SIGNS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Many women do not recognise or want to admit that they are victims of domestic violence. They may be very frightened to tell anyone what they are going through for fear of recriminations and due to threats of violence if they expose the abuse.

Even if someone is coming to your surgery or seeking your help with a seemingly unrelated issue you should be able to recognise the signs of domestic violence. Domestic violence is commonly a part of women's experiences of debt, homelessness, employment and issues with benefits.

Their partner might:

- Prevent them from seeing friends or family;
- Prevents them from continuing or starting a college course, or from going to work;
- Constantly checks up on them or follows them;
- Uploads tracking software to their phone, keys, or similar;
- Accuses them unjustly of flirting, cheating or of having affairs;
- Repeatedly belittles or humiliates them, or regularly criticises or insults them;
- Deliberately destroys their possessions;
- Denies them access to money or credit cards;
- Hurts or threatens them, their children, family members or pets; and/or
- Forces them to do things they don't want to do, including sexually.

They might say that they:

- Feel frightened or like they have to 'walk on eggshells';
- Change their behaviour because they're afraid of what their partner might do or say;
- Feel like you they can't do anything right by their partner sometimes, while at other times they are put on a pedestal; and/or
- Remember things, and are told they didn't happen, or don't remember things their partner insists happens.

Women are more likely to acknowledge they have an abusive partner and seek further help if they are directly asked if they are experiencing domestic violence.

Think about safety:

- Do not ask a woman about domestic violence if their partner is in the same room.
- If she has children with her, make sure they are taken to a different room if you are asking their mother about domestic violence.
- Make sure she has somewhere safe to go after she leaves your office.
- If the woman feels like she is in immediate danger (for example, if the perpetrator is with the victim) or there are threats to her life if she returns home, support her to call 999 or call for her.

WHAT DO VICTIMS NEED?

First and foremost survivors of domestic violence need to be listened to, believed and supported. The most important thing you can do is to listen to what she tells you, be supportive and put her in touch with a specialist service.

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT VICTIMS?

There are various ways in which you can support your constituent who may be a victim of domestic violence.

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HELPLINE

The National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247 (run in partnership with Refuge) is available for help and support for a victim, friend, family member 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

If safe to do so schedule a follow up appointment so they know you are there to support them.

SIGNPOST TO SPECIALIST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES

Specialist domestic violence services offer a range of support such as refuge accommodation, counselling, group therapy sessions and legal help. Use this link to find your local service:

<http://www.womensaid.org.uk/local-help>

Get in touch with your local service if you haven't been in contact with them before, let them know you are supportive of their work and will refer women on to them where appropriate.

ABOUT WOMEN'S AID

Women's Aid is the national charity for women and children working to end domestic abuse. Over the past forty years Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and coordinating responses to domestic violence and abuse through practice. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, listening and responding to their needs. We are a federation of over 220 organisations who provide more than 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. We provide expert training, qualifications and consultancy to a range of agencies and professionals working with survivors or commissioning domestic abuse services, and award a National Quality Mark for services which meet our quality standards. Our campaigns achieve change in policy, practice and awareness, encouraging healthy relationships and helping to build a future where domestic abuse is no longer tolerated. The 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247 (run in partnership with Refuge) and our range of online services, which include the Survivors' Forum, help hundreds of thousands of women and children every year.

www.womensaid.org.uk

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