

1 Definition

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

- Psychological (including threats and intimidation; the use of jealousy as a control);
- Physical (biting, kicking, punching, etc)
- Financial
- Emotional
- Sexual

'Controlling behaviour' is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities

2 Definition continued...

for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

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

The definition of domestic abuse includes so-called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. Victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group. Whilst the majority of cases are male on female violence, domestic abuse can be perpetrated within same sex relationships, by women against men, and by other family members.

3 Disclosure

There are many reasons why victims won't, or feel they can't, make a disclosure (e.g. fear, retaliation, denial, embarrassment, etc.), where there are inequalities (e.g. age, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.) it can make it harder. It is very important to build up trust to enable a possible future safe disclosure.

4 Signs

Be aware of signs that could indicate abuse is taking place. There may not always be physical injury. Other signs include controlling behaviour (e.g. partner always present during appointments; won't allow the person to talk for themselves, person has limited access to money, etc.). There may also be environmental factors (e.g. broken furniture, holes in walls/doors, tense atmosphere in the home).

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What to do

Refer to the [Sunderland Multi-Agency Domestic Violence and Abuse Referral Pathway Guidance](#).

Always be alert to the possibility that an individual is experiencing domestic abuse and be prepared to offer support or signposting, keep the local helpline number in your phone: 0800 066 555.

You should make a children's safeguarding referral for any child, including unborn baby, who is living with domestic abuse, contact 0191 520 5560 (office hours) or 0191 520 5552 (out of hours).

For adults experiencing domestic abuse a [Safeguarding Adult Concern](#) should be raised.

6 Risk Assessment

When assessing a victim's level of risk always use the [SafeLives DASH RIC](#), which comes with quick-start guidance.

Familiarise yourself with the questions as they cover many different areas.

The purpose of the RIC is to give a consistent and simple tool for staff and volunteers who work with adult victims of domestic abuse in order to help identify those at high risk of harm and whose case should be referred to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to manage their risk and develop a safety plan. Speak to your agency's safeguarding lead for any queries regarding completing the RIC.

5 Safe Enquiry

- Take protective measures to ensure that any discussions with potential victims of abuse are conducted in a safe and confidential environment without interruptions
- Ask direct questions about abuse, but only when the victim is on their own and in a private place, don't assume someone else will ask at another time
- If interpreters are needed always use professional interpreters, never use family members, children or friends where abuse is known or suspected
- Keep good records of any discussions and interventions offered
- Be clear about confidentiality
- [Language matters](#), as it can alienate victims and unintentionally collude with perpetrators. Think carefully how you record things and ensure you don't use victim-blaming language.

