

Talking about domestic abuse

Types of domestic abuse

- Psychological/emotional abuse: Includes name-calling, threats and manipulation, blaming you for the abuse or 'gas-lighting' - making you question your own reality.
- Economic abuse: Controlling your access to money or resources. He might take your wages, stop you from working, or put you in debt without your knowledge or consent.
- Sexual abuse: Doesn't have to be physical. He might manipulate, deceive or coerce you into doing things you don't want to do.
- Coercive control: When an abuser uses a pattern of behaviour over time to exert power and control. It is a criminal offence.
- Physical abuse: Not only hitting. He might restrain you, throw objects, pinch, or shove you, then dismiss it as a 'joke'.
- Tech-facilitated abuse: He might send abusive texts, demand access to your devices, track you with spyware, or share images of you online.

Economic abuse

- Economic abuse is a form of domestic abuse. It can involve withholding funds, taking out loans or accruing debt in someone's name without their consent or knowledge, or restricting someone's ability to work or study.
- In the UK, 39% of people (8.7m) have experienced economically abusive behaviour in a current or former relationship. Despite this, only 16% of people describe, or recognise, their experiences as abuse.
- Economic abuse rarely happens in isolation. In fact, 85% of people who experience it also face other forms of domestic abuse, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse.
- Survivors experiencing economic abuse can be left with long-term debt they are unable to repay. On average, those affected will owe £3,272, and one in five will have debts exceeding £5,000. Overall, £14.4bn of UK household debt can be directly attributed to economic abuse.

Coercive control key messages

- Domestic abuse isn't always physical.
- Coercive control is when a person with whom you are personally connected consistently behaves in ways that make you feel controlled, dependent, isolated or scared.
- Coercive control is a form of domestic abuse. It is a systematic pattern of abuse designed to control.
- Coercive control is a criminal offence that came into force on 29 December 2015. It carries a maximum of 5 years' imprisonment, a fine or both.
- The introduction of coercive and controlling behaviour as a criminal offence in 2015 marked a significant shift in understanding abuse as more than punches, kicks and physical violence. It recognised that intimate partner abuse is fundamentally about power and control and is a pattern of behaviour intended to cause harm.

Support

If you need to signpost your community to support:

- The National Domestic Abuse Helpline is open 24/7, offering free, confidential, specialist support on 0808 2000 247. Digital support is available via our live chat, Monday-Friday 10am-10pm, at www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk. You can also fill out a webform and request a call back at a safe time. From 10am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, you can speak to our expert Helpline team through a British Sign Language interpreter.
- For support with tech-facilitated abuse, visit refugetechsafety.org
- The Men's Advice Line, for male domestic abuse survivors, is 0808 801 0327 (run by Respect). The National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline is 0800 999 5428 (run by Galop).

General Conversations

Domestic abuse or domestic violence?

Use the term 'domestic abuse' where possible, as it encompasses all forms of abuse, not limited to physical violence.

Survivor or victim?

Where possible, use the term 'survivor' when referring to someone whose experience of domestic abuse is in the past. This is more empowering and highlights the individual's strength in overcoming abuse. 'Victim' can be used in the context of criminal justice, such as when discussing a crime or when a woman has been killed. For anyone currently in an abusive relationship, it is appropriate to say they are 'experiencing abuse' from their partner.

Language around perpetrators

Language about perpetrators should focus solely on their behaviour. Perpetrators of domestic abuse are often manipulative, and their close family or friends may not be aware of their wrongdoing. Avoid sharing quotes from the perpetrator's close network that contradict the survivor's account, such as 'he was so lovely, he was a great father.' This can contribute to a harmful narrative where the perpetrator is not held accountable for their actions.

Avoid 'just,' 'only' or 'only once'

Anything said after the words 'just' or 'only' tends to minimise the abuse and excuse the perpetrator's behaviour. Similarly, if an incident is described as happening only once, it downplays the severity of the abuse and suggests it may not happen again – which is not the case.

Do not use language that implies the survivor/victim is at fault

Never imply or suggest the survivor's actions or choices caused the abuse. Abuse is never the fault of the person experiencing it. A lot of people ask, 'Why didn't she leave?' instead of 'Why did he abuse her?'

Use language that encompasses all forms of abuse

Domestic abuse is often about power and control, not solely physical violence. When describing abuse, use terms like 'power and control,' 'manipulation,' and 'coercion' to emphasise the dynamics of abuse beyond physical harm.

Use trauma-informed language

When talking about abuse, use language that acknowledges the emotional and psychological scars, not just the physical. Words like 'healing,' 'recovery,' and 'support' can feel more respectful and offer a sense of hope.

Avoid harmful stereotypes

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of their background, gender, race or class. It is an incident or pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence. In the majority of cases, the abuser is a partner or ex-partner, but it can also be a family member or carer.

Be empathetic

Leaving an abusive relationship can be one of the hardest and most dangerous decisions a person can make. Financial, emotional, and safety barriers often make it difficult for someone to leave.