



COVID-19: Domestic Abuse Toolkit for Employers

Domestic stress

For the first time, the majority of employees will be working from home, and many more will be working from home for longer periods. Many Employees will also have the added responsibility of looking after their children while schools remain shut. It is likely that communities and neighbourhoods will feel different as further social distancing measures are implemented to control the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus).

This will prove unsettling to some and disruptive both to the employees and their families, creating new tensions as professional and personal lives collide.

Some people will have avoided working from home in the past as their domestic circumstances are at odds with this way of working. This can have a huge impact on personal and wider wellbeing.

Reasons for this may include:

- Inadequate accommodation for working from home (lack of internet, cramped space, lack of appropriate furniture, shared accommodation with others)
- Personal mental health and wellbeing issues that raise duty of care considerations for people working alone
- Different domestic backgrounds
- Abusive relationships from which work has been an escape

In many cases, the individual may have been able to keep these issues private but will now need support to disclose and manage them effectively.

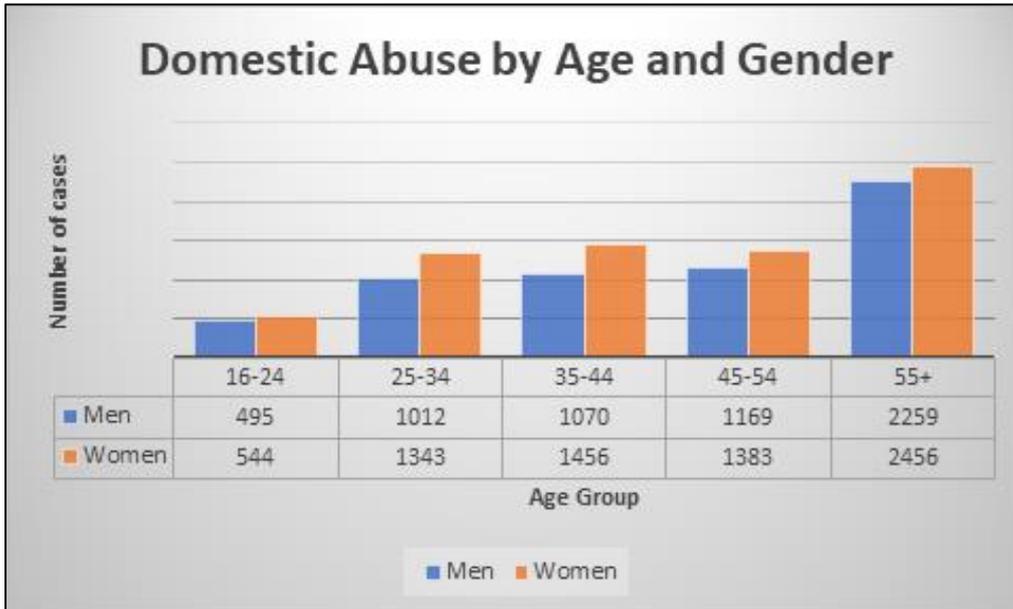
What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is more than just physical violence. It can also include, but is not limited to:

- coercive control and manipulation by psychological means of someone into doubting their own sanity
- economic abuse
- online abuse
- verbal abuse
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, in any walk of life, of any gender.

Domestic abuse by age / gender chart



Data source: Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics. ONS 25 November 2019 using data for the year ending March 2019. Please note that the ONS data does not include people aged 75+.

Domestic abuse through the race lens

- Domestic abuse affects women from all ethnic groups, and there is no evidence to suggest that women from some ethnic or cultural communities are any more at risk than others. However, the form the abuse takes may vary; in some communities, for example, domestic abuse may be perpetrated by extended family members, or it may include forced marriage, or female genital mutilation (FGM).
- Whatever their experiences, women from [Black, Asian or minority ethnic communities are likely to face additional barriers to receiving the help that they need.](#)
- Eliminating violence against women and girls is one of the targets under the Sustainable Development Goals. Findings show that some groups of women are more likely to experience partner abuse than others.
- Women who identified with [mixed / multiple ethnicities were more likely to have experienced partner abuse in the last 12 months](#) (10.1%) than any other ethnic group.

Home working, social distancing and self-isolation

Recent measures announced by the government to tackle coronavirus (COVID-19) have seen people's day-to-day lives drastically altered. Home working, social distancing and self-isolation can cause anxiety for those who are experiencing or feel at risk of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is a crime and unacceptable in any situation, no matter what stress you are under.



Domestic abuse often involves the perpetrator isolating the victim from family and friends. Feelings of isolation can only increase with home working, social distancing and self-isolation.

All employers should remind employees to stay in touch and understand that the mental health effects of domestic abuse can be exacerbated.

Furloughed workers may come under significant financial pressure, including financial abuse. Emotional support to needs to be provided to the workforce.

The most vulnerable need to be safeguarded and supported now more than ever.

Domestic abuse increases in UK

Fears are growing in the UK that the stay-at-home coronavirus guidelines may leave domestic abuse victims feeling especially isolated, very vulnerable and exposed. Home is not always the safe haven that it should be.

[The National Domestic Abuse](#) helpline has seen a 25% increase in calls and online requests for help since the 23 March 2020 lockdown, and visits to the National Domestic Abuse helpline website for information were 150% higher than during the last week in February 2020. More than 25 organisations helping domestic violence victims have reported an increase in their caseload since the start of the UK's coronavirus epidemic.

An audit of 119 organisations by the domestic abuse charity [SafeLives](#) found, however, that even as pressure on frontline services increased, most were being forced to reduce vital services. The groups were surveyed during the last week of March 2020, with 26 of them able to confirm increased caseloads owing to Covid-19. Three-quarters said they had had to reduce service delivery to victims.

A separate study highlights the plight of domestic-violence survivors. SafeLives interviewed 66 survivors, and women were asked to score themselves from zero to ten, with ten denoting "safe". More than half offered a score of five or less, with three saying they felt "not safe at all".

Domestic abuse victims are still allowed to leave home to seek help at refuges

Domestic abuse victims are still allowed to leave home to seek help at refuges despite rules to stop coronavirus spreading. The home secretary, [Priti Patel](#), has said the government would protect victims, saying it has given £1.6bn to local councils to help those in need and was working with charities.

Anyone who is at risk of, or experiencing, domestic abuse, is still able to leave and seek refuge. Refuges remain open, and the police will provide support to all individuals who are being abused - whether physically, emotionally, or otherwise.

The Home Secretary has also pledged to crack down on domestic abusers, and the government recently pledged £15 million to tackle domestic abuse crimes.

It comes after [police warned](#) the new rules made victims more vulnerable. Health concerns and job losses may also add pressure, causing some people to experience abuse for the first time.



Employer actions supporting employees at risk or experiencing domestic abuse

While levels of abuse may be rising, visibility within employment settings may be undermined because of the shift to remote working. Employers should prioritise staying in contact with staff during this time. They should also ensure activities that support colleague relationships beyond engagement on particular projects continue, for example, manager 121s and check-ins at the beginnings of team meetings.

Download [Business in the Community's / Public Health England's Domestic Abuse Toolkit](#), sponsored by the Insurance Charities, with support from the Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse, for further information. We have included a quick, actionable snapshot from the toolkit below:

1. **Acknowledge:** Use this toolkit to help understand the issues, and acknowledge every employer's responsibility to support victims of domestic abuse. Promote the information that the government is allowing domestic abuse victims to leave home to seek help at refuges.
2. **Respond:** If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, they should try to have a conversation to discuss the issue, identify and refer to appropriate support.

Here are some examples of questions and prompts that could be used to open a conversation:

- How are you doing at the moment?
 - Your wellbeing is important to me and I've noticed that you seem distracted / upset at the moment – are you ok?
 - If there's anything you'd like to talk to me about at any time? I'm always here to support you.
 - Is everything all right at home?
 - You don't have to tell me anything, but please know that I would like to support you if and when you feel you need it.
 - What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?
1. **Refer:** Inform all your employees that help is available. Signpost employees to organisations who can help employees affected by the issue. A full list of supportive organisations and links is included in the toolkit and below.

Below we have a list of supportive organisations and services across the UK that can provide incredible support and advice to those experiencing abuse. All names are hyperlinked and will take you directly to their website.

National support

If you feel you are at risk of abuse, worried you may commit domestic abuse, or are worried about a colleague or friend, support and help are available.

If you suspect that your neighbours or those in your community are victims of domestic abuse, we encourage you to report it to the police.

Call 999

If you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police - the police will continue to respond to emergency calls.



If you are in danger and unable to talk on the phone, call 999 and then press 55. This will transfer your call to the relevant police force who will assist you without you having to speak.

The 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline: Available 24-hours, for free and in confidence on: 0808 2000 247

Bright Sky app: The mobile app, free to download from the [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#), provides support and information to anyone who may be experiencing domestic abuse or is concerned about someone they know.

Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse: Help for employers who fear home is not a safe place for some employees.

Chayn: Provides online help and resources in a number of languages, ranging from identifying manipulative situations and how friends can support those being abused.

Galop: If you are a member of the LGBT+ community, Galop runs a specialist helpline on 0800 999 5428 or email help@galop.org.uk.

Men's Advice Line: A confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse and those supporting them. It can be contacted on 0808 801 0327.

ManKind: Advice and support for men experiencing domestic abuse.

Women's Aid: Provided additional advice specifically designed for the current COVID-19 outbreak including a live online chat service.

Respect Phonenumber: If you are worried about hurting the ones you love while staying at home, call for support and help to manage your behaviour on 0808 8024040.

Economic abuse: If you are concerned about how COVID-19 may affect your finances and leave you vulnerable to economic abuse, please see the advice provided by HM Treasury on what support is on offer.

The Money & Advice Service: Protecting against financial abuse.

Surviving Economic Abuse: economic abuse & the Coronavirus outbreak

Resources for children and families

Barnardos: Helping children and families affected by domestic abuse.

Childline: offers counselling online and over the phone from 9am – midnight.

NSPCC: If you're worried about a child, NSPCC has advice to help you keep them safe. They have a free and confidential 24-hour helpline for if you are worried about a child and need advice on 0808 800 5000. Alternatively, contact their text service 0800 056 0566 or 0800 1111 or email address help@nspcc.org.uk.

Refuge: Offers support tailored to women, children and families, including a free national helpline.

SafeLives: Effective help for children living with domestic abuse.



Young Minds: Supporting your child- domestic violence.

Domestic Abuse: How to Get Help: For more advice and guidance on domestic abuse from the UK government.

Northern Ireland

For Children's Social Work at the [Health and Social Care \(HSC\) Trust](#) in the area in which the child lives:

- Belfast HSC Trust 028 9050 7000
- SE HSC Trust 0300 1000 300
- Northern HSC Trust 0300 1234 333
- Southern HSC Trust 0800 7838745
- Western HSC Trust 028 7131 4090

Nexus: 24 hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse helpline. Please call 0808 802 1414.

PSNI: Call 101 for non-emergency, but if you need immediate help or advice, go to PSNI Online, or in an emergency where urgent help is needed, or you feel threatened call 999.

The Rowan: Sexual Assault Referral Centre for Northern Ireland. 0800 389 4424 (for both genders and all ages who have been sexually abused, assaulted or raped).

Victim Support NI: An independent charity supporting people affected by crime. We offer a free and confidential service, whether a crime has been reported and regardless of how long ago the event took place. Please call (028) 9024 3133.

Women's Aid NI: 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline. Available to anyone who has concerns about domestic or sexual abuse, now or in the past. It is open to all women and men affected by domestic and sexual violence. Please phone 0808 802 1414

Men's Advisory Project (MAP): Provides counselling services for men experiencing domestic abuse. Support and counselling services are also available to men who have previously left a violent or abusive relationship and who are still experiencing the effects. Please call (028) 9024 1929 – open 9am-5pm Monday-Friday to arrange counselling.

NI Social Services: Can provide practical assistance and guidance to those suffering abuse.

In addition, your GP can offer help and support. Many people experiencing abuse believe that their GP can be trusted with disclosure and can offer practical support.



Scotland

[Scottish Government announcement on funding/support for domestic abuse during COVID-19:](#)

Read more on what the Scottish government is doing in regards to domestic abuse.

[Abused Men in Scotland:](#) Information or support for men who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse. Dial 0808 800 0024

[Cedar Network:](#) A unique way of working with children, young people and their mothers who have experienced domestic abuse.

[Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage:](#) Helpline to support anyone with experience of domestic abuse or forced marriage, as well as their family members, friends, colleagues and professionals who support them.

[FearFree:](#) Support for people experiencing domestic abuse in Scotland who identify as a man or from the LGBT+.

[Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid:](#) Provide specialist support to women from the Asian, Black and Minority Ethnic community who experience domestic abuse influenced by culture and tradition.

[LGBT+ Youth Scotland:](#) Managed by LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Scotland, which works across Scotland to raise awareness of LGBT+ people's experiences of domestic abuse.

[Safer.Scotland:](#) Covid-19 and domestic abuse support.

[Women's Aid Scotland:](#) 24-hour hotline 0800 027 1234 and online support on domestic abuse.

[Shakti:](#) Help for black minority ethnic women, children and young people who are experiencing, or have experienced domestic abuse.

Wales

[Dyn Wales:](#) Offers support to men suffering from domestic abuse.

[Live Fear Free:](#) Website offers wider support for people affected by domestic abuse.

[Llamau:](#) Offers support for people experiencing homelessness across Wales, which includes people living in sheltered accommodation and sofa-surfing. They have published advice on specific support for people during COVID19, available in the link.

[Welsh Women's Aid:](#) Offers a free online chat service, and the Live Fear Free helpline, reachable at 0808 80 10 800. This is also the number for the All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline.



Appendix

The scale of the issue

An estimated 1.6 million women and 786,000 men experienced domestic abuse in England and Wales in the year ending March 2019, [according to the Office for National Statistics](#).

In 2018, [173 people were killed in domestic violence-related homicides](#), according to data obtained by the BBC from 43 police forces across the UK.

International rise in domestic abuse during Covid-19

Around the world, as cities have gone into lockdown to stop the spread of coronavirus, the mass efforts to save lives have put vulnerable people more at risk.

Domestic abuse [has already increased](#) elsewhere in the world as more people at risk from abuse are forced to stay indoors with their abusers due to the pandemic.

Women, men and children who live with domestic abuse have no escape from their abusers during quarantine. From Brazil to Germany, Italy to China, there has been an alarming rise in abuse.

In China's Hubei province, where the virus was first detected, domestic violence reports to police [more than tripled](#) during the lockdown in February from 47 last year to 162 this year.