



Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance



## Domestic Abuse Guidance for Private Rented Sector Landlords



### About this guidance

This guidance was developed by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) to provide landlords in the private rented sector (PRS) with information and advice on how to support tenants experiencing domestic abuse so that they may maintain stable housing, live safely and overcome abuse and its harmful aspects.

The guidance does not presume that landlords should or will be providing in-depth support to tenants experiencing domestic abuse, but it does recognise that landlords may be the first and only community members to whom victims may disclose abuse. This places landlords in a unique and vital position to identify domestic abuse and provide a safe and effective response that is within their professional remit. Therefore, this guidance seeks to support landlords to be able to:

- **identify** the signs of domestic abuse,
- **respond** safely and helpfully,
- **signpost** to local specialist services, and
- **offer** housing-specific support and solutions



## About domestic abuse

The cross-governmental definition of domestic 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 (including coercive and controlling behaviour)*
- *physical*
- *sexual*
- *financial emotional*

**Controlling behaviour** is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolation them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means need for independent, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

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

For more information about the forms of domestic abuse, please go to the Government’s webpage on [Domestic abuse: How to get help](#).



## Who can experience domestic abuse?

**Anyone** over the age of 16 years can experience domestic abuse regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, disability or socioeconomic status. Domestic abuse can be perpetrated by intimate partners or family members, including husbands or wives, partners or ex-partners, adolescent or adult children towards parents or siblings.

Domestic abuse is a form of gender-based violence and abuse, which means it is more likely to be experienced by women and perpetrated by men. In the last year, an estimated 1.6 million women and 786,000 men (aged 16 to 74 years) in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse<sup>1</sup>, and on average the police in England and Wales receive 100 calls per hour related to domestic abuse<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of National Statistics, 2019:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2019>

<sup>2</sup> HMIC, 2015. Increasing everyone’s business: A progress report on the police response to domestic abuse:

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/increasingly-everyones-business-domestic-abuse-progress-report.pdf>

Individuals from minoritized communities, such as LGBTQ+ people, older people, disabled people, and individuals from Black, Asian, Eastern European or other non-British ethnic backgrounds are just as likely, and in some cases more likely, to experience domestic abuse but are less likely to access specialist services and support.

For more information about what domestic abuse is and who are the victims of domestic abuse, please go to the Women's Aid website, [What is Domestic Abuse](#).



## Identifying domestic abuse within the PRS

Domestic abuse is just as prevalent in the private rented sector as in any other tenure of housing, and there may be specific signs of domestic abuse that are linked to a tenant's housing circumstances. These may include:

**Disclosures of domestic abuse:** It is possible that your tenant may also want to tell you about the abuse, however they may not say '*I am experiencing domestic abuse*'. Instead, they may disclose in other ways, such as stating:

- *I don't feel safe at home*
- *I feel scared/frightened of my (ex) partner/family member*
- *My (ex) partner/family member won't let me leave the homes*
- *My (ex) partner/family member hurt(s) me'.*

**Misidentified Anti-Social Behaviour:** We know that domestic abuse can often be mistaken as Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), and in fact, survivors are four times more likely than the general tenant population to receive ASB complaints. For example, neighbours may make noise complaints that could be the result of verbal assaults from the perpetrator, victim's calling out for help, or even the crashes and bangs of physical violence, including punching walls, slamming doors, kicking or throwing objects or physically assaulting adult or child victims.

**Rent Arrears:** We also know that victims of domestic abuse more likely to receive eviction notices due to rent arrears, which can often be the result of economic abuse from the perpetrator.

**Damaged property:** landlords may notice damage to property that could be the result of domestic abuse. For example, broken windows or doors, holes in the wall or damage to furniture or appliances.

**Requests for security measures or lock changes:** if the perpetrator has left the property, sometimes due to being arrested or as a result of a court issued order, the survivor may request to have the locks changed or install additional security measures



## Asking your tenants about domestic abuse

If you believe that your tenant may be experiencing domestic abuse you should ask them about their situation. It is then up to them to decide whether to tell you, and that's ok.

It's important to make sure that your tenant is **alone** and **safe** before speaking to them about the abuse, especially when you are speaking to a tenant over the phone. To first establish if they are safe and alone you should ask closed questions which allow them to give 'yes' or 'no' answers, such as:

- *'are you alone?' or*
- *'is it safe to speak with you right now about your relationship?'*

It's important to note that your tenant may be reluctant to tell you about their experience of domestic abuse for fear of being evicted or being asked to pay for the damages resulting from the abuse. They may also fear that they will not be believed or that they will be judged for not leaving the relationship sooner. Here are some ways to show them that it is okay to talk with you about the abuse:

- *'I've received some noise complaints from the neighbours lately and wanted to check whether you are safe at home and if there is any way I can help you.'*
- *'I've recently noticed some damage to the property and wanted to check whether you were safe and if there is any way I can help you.'*
- *I've noticed that you were unable to pay the rent last month and wondered if*
- *You mentioned that you're scared of your partner/he won't let you leave the house/he's hurt(ing) you. Would you like to tell me more about that so that I can see if there is any way for me to help?*



## Providing a safe and helpful response

If your tenant discloses domestic abuse to you, it is important to:

### Do

- **Listen** to them without judgement: never blame them for the abuse or excuse the perpetrator's behaviour or ask them why they have not left/ told the abuser to leave.
- **Believe them**
- **Validate** what they are telling you. For example, *'I'm glad you told me'*, *'this isn't your fault'*, *'you are not alone'*

### Do Not

- **Confront the abuser.** This could please the adult and child victims at an increased risk of harm
- **Contact the police or other specialist services unless the victim or anyone else is at an immediate risk of harm,** or when you need to report safeguarding concerns to adult or child safeguarding services, such as when children are in the household where domestic abuse is occurring, or you suspect abuse towards a vulnerable adult.



## In an emergency

If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to the victim, children, perpetrator or anyone else in the household, encourage them to call 999 immediately.

Inform them of the Silent Solution System for calling the Police without needing to speak (call 999 and press 55 when prompted. There is no need to speak at all)

If they are unable to verbally communicate, inform them of the emergency text service.

If your tenant is unable to call the police when there is an immediate risk of harm, get as much information as you can regarding their current location and contact details and then call 999 to report the concern.



## Safeguarding children

Domestic abuse profoundly affects children who may witness the abuse or be directly harmed by the perpetrator. Simply living in a home that is dominated by fear and control is detrimental to children's wellbeing. You do not have a statutory duty to safeguard children, but the government strongly advises that safeguarding is **everybody's business**. If you have any concerns that there are children who may be at risk of harm you can seek advice by:

- Calling [Childline](#) on 0800 1111
- Calling the [NSPCC](#) on 0808 800 5000
- Calling your local Children's Safeguarding Team
- Calling [CrimeStoppers](#) to anonymously report a crime if you believe a crime has been committed

You do not need the consent of the parents in order to seek advice, but if you are sure it would not raise the risk of harm to the child(ren), you can discuss your concerns with the victim. For the safety of the victim and the child(ren), it is important to **not** inform the perpetrator of domestic abuse.



## Signposting to specialist services

As a PRS landlord, you are not expected to provide specialist support to tenants experiencing domestic abuse, however you can give them information for the professionals who can.

You can find out the details for your local specialist domestic abuse services by visiting your local authority website or simply googling 'domestic abuse services in [enter location]'. They will provide contact information.

You can also signpost your tenant to national domestic abuse services and advice, which are provided below in a separate A4 sheet that you can directly provide to your tenant if it is safe to do so.

You can also include the number for the [National Domestic Abuse Helpline \(0808 2000 247\)](tel:08082000247) within your tenancy sign-on pack, along with all the information you usually provide. Country specific helpline details are listed in the Domestic Abuse Resources Page below.



## Offering housing specific solutions

As a PRS landlord you are under no obligation to support your tenant to remain safely within their property or leave if they choose to do so. However, by offering help in small yet effective ways, you could play a significant role in supporting victims and their children to achieve safety and stable housing. Below are some suggestions

**Signposting to specialist services:** see paragraphs above and the A4 referral sheet below

**Allowing enhanced security measures:** if the perpetrator has left the property, sometimes due to being arrested or as a result of a court issued order, the victim may request to have the locks changed or install additional security measures.

Most local authority areas offer these services to victims of domestic abuse for free, and they can find out more information on their local authority website, via the police or through the local domestic abuse services. This may be referred to as a Sanctuary Scheme. The best way you can support them is to allow them to put these measures in place.

If the victim requests the locks to be changed, you will need to consider whether the perpetrator is a joint tenant and therefore has the right to enter the property, which may have been suspended if there is a court order in place, such as an Occupation Order, or if the victim is a sole tenant.

**Addressing rent arrears and damages:** if your tenant has accrued rent arrears or damages as a result of the abuse, you may be able to support them to manage these payments effectively. For example, you could agree to allow them to pay the arrears and/or damages incrementally over time. Where they can, some PRS landlords have offered to cover the cost of damages through their housing insurance. You can also encourage your tenant to access services such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau or Shelter for [information about local housing allowance for private renters](#)

**Tenancy security:** many victims of domestic abuse find it difficult to maintain safe and secure housing when they are either sharing a joint tenancy with the perpetrator or living in a property solely contracted in the perpetrator's name.

Due to current tenancy law, joint tenants are a 'single legal entity', which means that a victim cannot have the perpetrator removed from the tenancy without their consent. It also means that either party can end the tenancy without the other's consent, placing significant power in the hands of perpetrator to make the victim and their children homeless.

There are legal mechanisms in place which the victim can use to have the perpetrator temporarily removed from the property, such as Occupation Orders or Domestic Violence Protection Orders, however these do not affect tenancy agreements and therefore do not address the long-term housing needs of victims. Therefore, it is important to speak to your tenant when they are alone and it is safe, about the available options to make the right decision for them and their family.



Get in touch

If you would like more information please go to the [DAHA contact us page](#).





## Domestic abuse support and resources

### Helplines

**England:** Freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247 (run by Refuge)

Women's Aid live chat service (available Monday to Friday, 10am-4pm, Saturday - Sunday 10am-12pm)

**Northern Ireland:** Freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline 0808 802 1414

**Scotland:** Freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0800 027 1234

**Wales:** Freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 8010 800

**Men's Advice Line:** 0808 801 0327 (for men experiencing domestic abuse)

**Respect helpline:** 0808 802 4040 (for anyone worried that they may be harming someone else)

**Dyn Wales/Dyn Cymru:** 0808 801 0321 (for men in Wales experiencing domestic abuse)

**Galop:** 0800 999 5428 (national helpline for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people experiencing domestic abuse)

**Forced Marriage Unit:** 0207 008 0151

**Karma Nirvana:** 0800 5999 247 (available Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm for anyone at risk of so called 'honour-based abuse').

**Paladin - National Stalking Advocacy Service:** 020 3866 4107

**Rights of Women –** 020 7251 6577 (free legal advice for women)

### Resources

**Shelter:** [advice for private renting](#)

**Shelter:** [advice if you're homeless due to domestic abuse](#)

**Women's Aid:** [Survivor's Handbook](#)

**Surviving Economic Abuse:** [resources for women](#)