



# SPOTTING DOMESTIC ABUSE

We take a look at the signs of domestic abuse and where to direct clients for appropriate support

It is estimated that 5.5% of adults in England and Wales – which amounts to 2.3 million people between the ages of 16 and 74 – experienced domestic abuse in the 12 months leading up to March 2020. In the highest percentage of cases, this abuse was carried out by a partner or ex-partner, rather than a family member (ONS, 2020a).

Statistics also show that the number of domestic abuse-related offences recorded by police in England and Wales during the first lockdown (from March to June 2020) increased by 7% against the same period in 2019 and by 18% against the same period in 2018.

As the number of offences recorded by police has been increasing in recent years, the Office of National Statistics stress that “it is not possible to determine what impact the coronavirus pandemic may have had on these increases seen in 2020 (ONS, 2020b).”

However, domestic abuse is often a ‘silent crime’ that in many cases is not reported to the police, which is why it is also worth taking into account statistics offered by support groups working in the field. For example, a survey conducted by Women’s Aid in April 2020 found that “abusers are using COVID-19 to perpetuate abuse, and the abuse is escalating. In the survey, 67% of survivors who are currently experiencing abuse said it has got worse since COVID-19 and 72% said their abuser had more control over their life. [...] This also impacts on children who are affected by the domestic abuse directed towards their mothers. Additionally, over one-third of survivors with

children told us their abuser had shown an increase in abusive behaviour directed towards their children” (Women’s Aid, 2020).

## What is domestic abuse?

Farrah Idris, MFHT, is a complementary therapist, social prescribing link worker and former independent domestic abuse advocate. She explains, “Domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence. It can include repeated patterns of abusive behaviour to maintain power and control in a relationship. It includes abuse carried out by a partner, ex-partner or family member. The government’s definition\* of domestic violence and abuse recognises this and defines domestic abuse as:

‘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. It can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional (UK Government, 2013).’

“Women are predominantly the victims, with two women a week killed by a current or ex-partner (ONS, 2019). However, domestic abuse also affects men and occurs within LGBTQ+ communities”.

\*At the time of writing the government is introducing a statutory definition of domestic →

## GUIDANCE FROM WOMEN'S AID – RECOGNISING DOMESTIC ABUSE

Although every situation is unique, there are common factors that link the experience of an abusive relationship. Acknowledging these factors is an important step in preventing and stopping the abuse. This list can help you to recognise if you, or someone you know, are in an abusive relationship. These include:



■ **Destructive criticism and verbal abuse:** shouting; mocking; accusing; name calling; verbally threatening.

■ **Pressure tactics:** sulking; threatening to withhold money, disconnecting the phone and internet, taking away or destroying your mobile, tablet or laptop, taking the car away, taking the children away; threatening to report you to the police, social services or the mental health team unless you comply with their demands; threatening or attempting self-harm and suicide; withholding or pressuring you to use drugs or other substances; lying to your friends and family about you; telling you that you have no choice in any decisions.

■ **Disrespect:** persistently putting you down in front of other people; not listening or responding when you talk; interrupting your telephone calls; taking money from you without asking; refusing to help with childcare or housework.

■ **Breaking trust:** lying to you; withholding information from you; being jealous; having other relationships; breaking promises and shared agreements.

■ **Isolation:** monitoring or blocking your phone calls, e-mails and social media accounts, telling you where you can and cannot go; preventing you from seeing friends and relatives; shutting you in the house.

■ **Harassment:** following you; checking

up on you; not allowing you any privacy (for example, opening your mail, going through your laptop, tablet or mobile), repeatedly checking to see who has phoned you; embarrassing you in public; accompanying you everywhere you go.

■ **Threats:** making angry gestures; using physical size to intimidate; shouting you down; destroying your possessions; breaking things; punching walls; wielding a knife or a gun; threatening to kill or harm you and the children; threatening to kill or harm family pets; threats of suicide.

■ **Sexual violence:** using force, threats or intimidation to make you perform sexual acts; having sex with you when you don't want it; forcing you to look at pornographic material; constant pressure and harassment into having sex when you don't want to, forcing you to have sex with other people; any degrading treatment related to your sexuality or to whether you are lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.

■ **Physical violence:** punching; slapping; hitting; biting; pinching; kicking; pulling hair out; pushing; shoving; burning; strangling, pinning you down, holding you by the neck, restraining you.

■ **Denial:** saying the abuse doesn't happen; saying you caused the abuse; saying you wind them up; saying they can't control their anger; being publicly gentle and patient; crying and begging for forgiveness; saying it will never happen again.

Source: Women's Aid ([womensaid.org.uk](http://womensaid.org.uk))

abuse,' which will be in two parts. The first part will define the relationship between the abuser and the abused, and the second will define what constitutes abusive behaviour. For more information see

[fht.org.uk/DA-definition](http://fht.org.uk/DA-definition)

### Spotting the signs of domestic abuse

The therapist-client relationship is one built on trust and confidentiality. Very often, clients will 'open up' to their therapist before, during or after treatment, or simply make comments that could suggest something isn't right at home. Depending on the type of therapy offered, the therapist may also see areas of the client's body that are normally covered by clothing, which might reveal bruising or other signs of physical violence.

The frightening reality is that many people experiencing domestic abuse will not get to visit a therapist on a regular basis, because the person abusing them will be controlling who they see, where they go and how they spend their money. But in the event that you are treating someone who is experiencing domestic abuse, what are the signs to look out for and how can you help them to find appropriate advice and support?

"Victims are often unlikely to report the abuse for fear of reprisals and ongoing fear," Farrah explains. "In cases of emotional abuse, the victim may not feel they have 'evidence' to disclose the abuse and attempt to self-manage the situation. As a result, there may be a noticeable change in behaviour, for example, low mood, depression, withdrawal, anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, body pain, digestive issues and headaches to name a few. These symptoms do not confirm the presence of abuse – there can be underlying health issues, however the impact of domestic abuse on an individual can manifest in a range of physical and emotional symptoms."

So what can a therapist do if they suspect a client is being abused? As a client may not disclose abuse explicitly, Farrah stresses that it is important to be alert to changes in their health and emotional state. "Listen to the client and note how they talk in relation to their partnerships/relationships. There may not be physical violence, which might be noticeable in terms of bruising, but they may be experiencing controlling, coercive behaviour. Ask your client how they feel. Do they feel safe? Are they able

to do things independently? Do they have their own money? This does not have to be a detailed consultation, but just gentle scoping. You can of course state that you are not a specialist – you are simply concerned about their safety. Where appropriate, you can then provide the client with information about relevant support services. However, one word of warning: unless the client consents, do not email or text them helpline numbers or web addresses, as their devices or phone may be monitored by their abuser. My

recommendation would be to keep a diary of local and national services to hand so that you can give these details to clients, if needed or requested, and they can store that information however they choose."

Farrah also highlights that "safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and particularly where children may be impacted by domestic abuse. Any safeguarding matters should be reported to local authorities and the police".

If you do support someone who is experiencing domestic abuse – personally

or professionally — and you feel affected by this, it is important to seek supervision or counselling to protect your own mental and emotional wellbeing. 

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For references and further reading, visit [fht.org.uk/IT-references](http://fht.org.uk/IT-references)

## USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

The organisations listed below offer information and support services to those experiencing domestic abuse or violence, as well as information for those concerned about someone they think may be experiencing domestic abuse. A number of these organisations also offer training opportunities.

■ **Childline (UK)** - Childline helps anyone under the age of 19, with any issue they're going through.  
■ [childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk) / 0800 1111

■ **Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline (Northern Ireland)** - A 24-hour helpline funded by the Departments of Health, Justice & Communities that offers support, help, signposting and referral to victims, family, friends and professionals.  
■ [dsahelpline.org](http://dsahelpline.org) / 0808 802 1414

■ **Galop (UK)** - Provides support to all LGBT+ people who've experienced hate crime, domestic abuse or sexual violence. It also runs the National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans+ Domestic Abuse Helpline.  
■ [galop.org.uk](http://galop.org.uk) / 0800 999 5428

■ **Karma Nirvana (UK)** - Supports victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriage, including a helpline to support victims.  
■ [karmanirvana.org.uk](http://karmanirvana.org.uk) / 0800 5999 247

■ **Live Fear Free (Wales)** - Offers help and advice about violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.  
■ [gov.wales/live-fear-free](http://gov.wales/live-fear-free) / 0808 80 10 800

■ **Mankind Initiative (UK)** - A specialist charity focussing on male victims of domestic abuse that offers information and support, including a helpline.  
■ [mankind.org.uk](http://mankind.org.uk) / 01823 334244

■ **Men's Advice Line (UK)** - A confidential helpline, email and webchat service for male victims of domestic abuse.  
■ [mensadvice.org.uk](http://mensadvice.org.uk) / 0808 8010327

■ **National FGM Support Clinics (England)** - Community-based clinics that offer a range of support services for women with female genital mutilation (FGM).  
■ [nhs.uk/conditions/female-genital-mutilation-fgm](http://nhs.uk/conditions/female-genital-mutilation-fgm)

■ **Refuge (England)** - Specialist support for women, children and some men escaping domestic violence and other forms of violence.  
■ [refuge.org.uk](http://refuge.org.uk) / 0808 2000 247

■ **Safelives (UK)** - A UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse through training programmes.  
■ [safelives.org.uk](http://safelives.org.uk)

■ **Scottish Women's Aid** - The lead organisation in Scotland working towards the prevention of domestic abuse.  
■ [womensaid.scot](http://womensaid.scot) / 0800 027 1234

■ **Southall Black Sisters (England)** - This organisation has national reach and focuses on the needs of black and minority women but will not turn any woman away who needs emergency help.  
■ [southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://southallblacksisters.org.uk) / 0208 571 9595

■ **Stonewall (England, Scotland, Wales)** - Offers information and support for LGBT communities and their friends.  
■ [stonewall.org.uk](http://stonewall.org.uk) / 0800 050 2020

■ **UK SAYS NO MORE/ Safe Spaces (UK)** - A national campaign to raise awareness to end domestic abuse and sexual violence across the UK, which also provides Safe Spaces online and in local banks and pharmacies.  
■ [uksaysnomore.org](http://uksaysnomore.org)

■ **Women's Aid (England)** - Women's Aid is a national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children.  
■ [womensaid.org.uk](http://womensaid.org.uk)