



Responding to Domestic Abuse allegations or concerns – guidance for use in parishes

During the coronavirus pandemic staying at home was essential to prevent the virus from spreading. But, for some people home isn't safe. On the 27th April 2020 the BBC reported that calls to a national domestic abuse helpline rose by 49% and killings doubled weeks after the lockdown. There was also a 35% rise in calls to a Men's Advice Line.

It is anticipated that there will be a sharp rise in people calling for help as they are able to get out of the house and make safe contact with people.

It is possible that there will be those in your church who have been affected by domestic abuse.

Within the next few weeks, it is anticipated that some Churches will be re-opening, in various forms and to varying degrees. Churches are viewed by many as 'safe places' and, in light of the figures represented above, we need to be prepared to receive disclosures or concerns being raised. This guidance has been provided to assist you in dealing with these situations.

(For clarity, domestic abuse, or domestic violence, is defined across Government as any incident of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of their gender or sexuality. Domestic abuse' covers a range of types of abuse, including, but not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse)¹.

The safety of victims is paramount.

Dial 999 if you witness a violent incident, if the person needs medical care or there is an immediate risk to life.

1. Your Role

If you become aware that someone within your parish is experiencing domestic violence and abuse, then **a response is always required** and you should inform your Safeguarding Coordinator within 24 hours.

Where there are children in the household, concerns must be passed to the statutory authorities. Check with your Safeguarding Coordinator whether you are to do this, or whether the safeguarding office will do this.

If you do not feel able to respond yourself, you should bring it to the attention of someone who may be able to help such as a Priest or Deacon or Parish Safeguarding Representative, so that they can inform the Safeguarding Coordinator and take any other necessary action.

The role of the person making a response is to focus on the safety of the victim or survivor and any children where they are involved. The role is not to instruct or advise about a particular course of action or act as a caseworker. Escaping domestic abuse is a complex process and you may be placing yourself and the person at risk if you intervene without professional assistance – you just need to know where to refer them to and how to support them.

2. Supporting the Person

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to and believe what the person tells you – too often people do not believe the person when they first disclose abuse. • Reassure the person that the abuse is not their fault and that you are there for them. Tell them nobody deserves to be threatened or beaten, despite what the abuser or anybody else has said. • Acknowledge that they are in a frightening and difficult situation. • Talk to the person and encourage them to open up and talk to you. You may have to try several times before they will confide in you. Be patient. It can take time for someone to recognise that they are being abused and even longer to be able to make safe and permanent decisions about what to do. Recognising the problem is an important first step. • Take into account the person's age and level of understanding, their culture and use of language. • Try to be direct and start by saying something like, "I'm worried about you because ..." or, "I'm concerned about your safety..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not judge the person. • Do not ask for proof of the allegations; • Do not promise the person total confidentiality but explain that the information will be treated with great care and shared with specific professionals who need to know. • Do not tell the person to leave or criticise them for staying. Although you may want the person to leave, they have to make that decision in their own time (research shows an abused a person, who is, has or is being abused, is at most risk at the point of separation and immediately after leaving an abusive partner). Leaving takes a great deal of strength and courage. An abused person can face huge obstacles such as nowhere to go, no money and no-one to turn to for support. • Do not encourage them to forgive the alleged perpetrator and/or take them back. • Do not make the person who is accused of the abuse aware that an allegation has been made.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the person has not spoken to anyone else, encourage them to seek the help of a domestic violence agency that understands what they are going through and offers specialist support and advice (details of support organisations are listed below).• Talk about how the person can keep themselves and their children safe.• Suggest a code word or action that is only known to the person and somebody who is supporting them so they can signal when they are in danger and cannot access help themselves.• Talk about how it isn't children's responsibility to protect their parent but in an emergency they could call for help from the police, go to a neighbour, or a relative or someone they trust within the Church.• Acknowledge their strengths and frequently remind them that they are coping well with a challenging and stressful situation.• Do try wherever possible to talk in a safe, private place where you will not be interrupted, or arrange to talk again.• Make a record of the conversation and date and time it. Do not include your own opinions. Keep the notes in a secure place.• Do keep the victim informed if you are making a safeguarding report or making a referral and let them know what happens next.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not tell anyone, who is not required to know, the whereabouts of the victim.• Do not discuss the victim's situation with anyone who is not required to know – respect them and the boundaries of confidentiality.• Do not put words into the person's mouth.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on supporting the person and building their self-confidence.• Where appropriate, provide religious guidance emphasizing aspects of our Catholic beliefs which prioritise equality, the dignity of our lives, the rights to be free of violence and intimidation but do not recommend couples' counselling/mediation with them and their partner.	
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Dioceses can adopt and publish a domestic abuse statement, including who to contact if there are concerns.

Where domestic abuse occurs it is entirely the responsibility of the abuser: there are no acceptable excuses.

Abuse of any kind is contrary to the will of God and an affront to human dignity.

Helplines

National Domestic Abuse Helpline

The [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) is run by Refuge and offers free, confidential support 24 hours a day to victims and those who are worried about friends and loved ones.

Telephone and TypeTalk: 0808 2000 247

Wales Live Fear Free Helpline

The [Wales Live Fear Free Helpline](#) offers help and advice about violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Telephone: 0808 8010 800

TypeTalk: 18001 080 8801

Text: 078600 77 333

The Men's Advice Line

The Men's Advice Line is a confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse and those supporting them.

Telephone: 0808 801 0327

Email: info@mensadvice.org.uk

Galop - for members of the LGBT+ community

Galop runs the National LGBT+ domestic abuse helpline.

Telephone: 0800 999 5428

TypeTalk: 18001 020 7704 2040

Women's Aid

Women's Aid has a [live chat service](#) available Mondays to Fridays between 10am and 12pm as well as an online survivor's forum. You can also find your local domestic abuse service on their website.

The Survivor's Handbook, created by Women's Aid, provides information on housing, money, helping your children and your legal rights.

Women's Aid have [guidance documents on domestic abuse and coronavirus](#) for victims, family and friends, and community members of those affected.

Karma Nirvana

Karma Nirvana runs a national helpline for victims of honour-based abuse, forced marriage and domestic abuse. If you are unable to call or email, you can [send a message securely on the website](#).

Telephone: 0800 5999 247

Email: support@karmanirvana.org.uk

Hestia

Hestia provides a free mobile app, Bright Sky, which provides support and information to anyone who may be in an abusive relationship or those concerned about someone they know.

Hourglass

The Hourglass confidential helpline provides information and support to anyone concerned about harm, abuse or exploitation of an older person.

Telephone: 0808 808 8141

Southall Black Sisters

Southall Black Sisters offer advocacy and information to Asian and Afro-Caribbean women suffering abuse.

Stay Safe East

Stay Safe East provides advocacy and support services to disabled victims and survivors of abuse.

Telephone: 020 8519 7241

Text: 07587 134 122

Email: enquiries@staysafe-east.org.uk

Victim Support

Victim Support runs a free and confidential 24/7 support telephone service for victims of crimes including domestic abuse, and also have free [24/7 live chat support on their website](#) available across England and Wales.

Telephone: 0808 16 89 111

SignHealth

SignHealth provides domestic abuse service support for deaf people in British Sign Language (BSL).

Telephone: 020 3947 2601

Text/WhatsApp/Facetime: 07970 350366

Email: da@signhealth.org.uk

Shelter

Shelter provide free confidential information, support and legal advice on all

NSPCC

The NSPCC operates a national female genital mutilation (FGM) helpline, which offers guidance and support if you are worried about a child who is at risk of FGM or about somebody who has already undergone FGM.

Telephone: 0800 028 3550

Email: fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk

Sexual Assault Referral Centres

[Sexual Assault Referral Centres](#) provide advice and support services to victims and survivors of sexual assault or abuse.

Surviving economic abuse

If you are concerned about how coronavirus may affect your finances and leave you vulnerable to economic abuse, see [the advice provided by HM Treasury](#) on what support is on offer.

The charity [Surviving Economic Abuse](#) has also provided additional coronavirus guidance and support.

National Stalking Helpline

Operated by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, the National Stalking Helpline gives practical information, support, and advice on risk, safety planning and legislation to victims of stalking, their friends, family, and professionals working with victims. They are open from 9:30am to 4pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and 1pm to 4pm Wednesday.

Telephone: 0808 802 0300

Email: use the [stalking helpline enquiry form](#) to get in touch.

Get help if you think you may be an abuser

If you are concerned that you or someone you know may be an abuser, there is support available.

[Respect Phonenumber](#) is an anonymous and confidential helpline for men and women who are harming their partners and families. The helpline also takes calls from partners or ex-partners, friends and relatives who are concerned about perpetrators.

A webchat service is available Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 10am to 11am and from 3pm to 4pm.

Telephone: 0808 802 4040

Get help for children and young people

NSPCC

The [NSPCC](#) helpline is available for advice and support for anyone with concerns about a child.

The NSPCC has issued [guidance for spotting and reporting the signs of abuse](#).

Telephone: 0808 800 5000

Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can contact the NSPCC via [SignVideo](#) using your webcam. SignVideo, using British Sign Language, is available on PC, Mac, iOS (iPhone/iPad) and Android smartphones (4.2 or above). This service is available Monday to Friday from 8am to 8pm and Saturdays from 8am to 1pm.

Childline

[Childline](#) provides help and support to children and young people.

Telephone: 0800 1111

Barnardo's

[Barnardo's](#) provide support to families affected by domestic abuse.

Family Lives

[Family Lives](#) provide support through online forums.

Further information and advice can be found on the CSAS website -

<http://www.dayforlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CSAS-NCSC-Guidance-Supporting-people-who-may-be-experiencing-domestic-violence.pdf>

The Hurt by Abuse Leaflets can be found at :-

<https://www.csas.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/NCSC-Abuse-leaflet-2019-Safeguarding-Lead-MASTER.pdf>

Diocese/Religious Logo

Safeguarding Coordinator.....

Safeguarding Representative

1 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52433520>