

Domestic violence – what to do about it

If you are thinking about leaving an abusive relationship and are worried about your safety or the safety of your children, you do not have to suffer alone. There are people who can help, and you can take steps to stay safe.

Domestic violence does not just mean that your partner is hitting you. The abuse can be physical, emotional, sexual or verbal.

Domestic violence can also include many things, such as the constant breaking of trust, psychological games, harassment and financial control.

It can have an impact on adults in all types of relationships and can also involve violence between parents and children.

If you are in an abusive relationship, there are three important steps you must take:

- **recognise** that it is happening to you
- **accept** that you are not to blame
- **get** help and support.

Getting help

This is perhaps the most important thing that you can do.

In an emergency, call 999. Domestic violence is treated very seriously by the police, and they will take action to protect you.

If it is not an emergency, you could contact your local police station and discuss your situation with them. You can also contact independent organisations such as Victim Support to ask for help and advice. Go to www.victimsupport.org.uk or phone 0845 30 30 900.

Police and social workers will use tact and care in order to protect you, and to make sure that you get the help you need. They can put you in touch with volunteer organisations who provide refuge accommodation where you'll be safe.

Advice and support

There are many people and organisations you can turn to if you are suffering from domestic violence. Your GP can direct you to groups that work with victims of abuse. They can point you to local support groups and charities that help victims and their children escape the cycle of violence.

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If you don't want to discuss it with your GP, you can call one of these helplines.

- England domestic violence helpline: 0808 2000 247
- Northern Ireland Women's Aid 24-hour domestic violence helpline: 0800 917 1414
- Scotland domestic abuse helpline: 0800 027 1234
- Wales domestic abuse helpline: 0808 80 10 800
- Men's advice and enquiry line: 0808 801 0327

They can make sure you find safe emergency refuge accommodation and connect you with people who can ensure that you're protected. You do not have to tell them your name.

Rights of domestic abuse victims

Children and your rights

Your abuser may threaten that if you leave or tell anyone about what's happening, your child will be taken away from you. It's important that you know that Social Services will not take your child away for this reason.

If you fear your partner will abduct your children, get advice as soon as possible. Advice groups include:

- a local Women's Aid group
- refuge
- a local Law Centre
- a local Citizens Advice Bureau
- a solicitor.

They can all advise you on how to protect your child. They will explain how contact between your child and a violent partner can be restricted.

These groups will explain that, under the Family Law Act 1996, you can apply for an order that will protect you from threats or violence (this is called a 'non-molestation order').

Your home and your rights

You can apply for an order that will protect your right to live safely in your family home (this is called an 'occupation order'). If granted, it would order your abuser to move out of the house, and forbid him even to enter it.

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If you are in this situation please contact one of the advice groups listed above or one of the organisations below.

Useful organisations

Women's Aid

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic violence against women and children.

Head Office
PO BOX 391
Bristol BS99 7WS

Free 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 2000 247

www.womensaid.org.uk

Law Centres Federation (LCF)

Law Centres are not-for-profit legal practices providing free legal advice and representation to disadvantaged people.

64 Great Eastern Street
London EC2A 3QR

020 7749 9120

Community Legal Advice 0845 345 4 345

www.lawcentres.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

National organisation and local branches help people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice.

www.adviceguide.org.uk

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Refuge

National organisation provides advice and places of safety.

Head Office
4th Floor
International House
1 St Katharine's Way
London E1W 1UN

Free 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 2000 247

www.refuge.org.uk

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Men's Advice Line

National helpline for men who are experiencing violence and abuse from their partners and also for men who are concerned about their own violence.

Freephone helpline 0808 801 0327

www.mensadviceline.org.uk

Adapted from www.direct.gov.uk/en/CrimeJusticeAndTheLaw/VictimsOfCrime/DG_4003136#standard