

## **Domestic Abuse – Guidance for Professionals**

Domestic abuse is defined as ‘Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or who have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender, sexuality or ethnicity.

This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and resources for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance or 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 their victim.

Domestic abuse can occur in all sections of society irrespective of gender, race, culture, nationality, religion, sexuality, disability, age, class or educational level.

### **Recognise, Respond, Record, Refer**

#### **1. Recognise**

##### **Asking the question**

It is now recognised good practice for many services to ask people about domestic abuse routinely or where other vulnerabilities indicate it would be appropriate. We know that from talking to victims and survivors that it is hard for someone to disclose that they are experiencing domestic abuse.

People need to feel that the person asking:

- Is genuinely interested
- Will be non-judgemental
- And will know how to respond if the answer is yes

Many people will not use the label domestic abuse from their experiences or they may not be familiar with the term (especially if they use another language), or they may think it only applies to physical violence. It is therefore important to think about how to ask about domestic abuse and be familiar with behaviours before you do so.

## 2. Respond

### Framing the question

Where possible and appropriate, start with framing the question by explaining why you are asking.

For example: 'Given the current situation and the fact that everyone is spending more time in their home together. We are just checking with all our clients the impact that, is having so that we can ensure we are able to provide the best support.'

Explaining why you are asking is helpful, especially when you are talking to people who may be mistrustful and query the motives behind your questions.

Example introduction:

Due to the Covid-19 situation, as part of the conversations we are having with all of our clients at the moment, we are asking questions about other issues besides ..... (reason for service involvement). We feel it is really important to help you with any problems or issues that you may be experiencing. We understand that sometimes in order to help with one problem other problems must also be addressed and at times like this, which none of us have ever experienced before, we want to ensure that you feel safe in your home environment and that if you do require any help that we are able to arrange that for you.

*Example questions:*

- Is everything alright at home? How are you feeling?
- Are you getting support from your partner/family members at home?
- Everyone has rows at times, have you seen an increase in rows/arguments? What happens when these occur?
- Do arguments or comments made ever result in you feeling put down or bad about yourself?
- Has anyone ever been violent towards you? Who?
- Do you ever feel frightened or have you ever felt frightened?
- Does your partner and/or family members like to know what you are doing? Who you are speaking to?
- Does your partner control your access to finances or ability to do what you would like to do?
- You mentioned that your partner and/or family member uses alcohol/drugs/gambles – how do they react when doing this?
- Does your partner pressure you to have sex or perform sexual acts?

*Validating*

- Be sensitive, respectful and listen carefully to what you are being told.
- Seek to empower victims, not to take over or make decisions for them. Ask them what they want you to do.
- Remain non-judgemental – never imply that the victim is to blame for the abuse.
- Validate the victim's experience; tell them you are glad they told you.
- Make your role clear, explain boundaries and the limits of confidentiality, the extent and limits of your powers and legal duties.
- Give key messages, e.g. you are not alone, you do not deserve to be treated like this, there is support and help available for you.
- Provide information on the help which is available, to enable the client to make an informed and safe choice to protect themselves and their children.

*Address immediate safety issues*

- Ensure the immediate safety of the victim and anyone else in the family
- Do not take any action that could place you or your colleagues at risk of violence.
- Seek emergency assistance if needed.

### **3. Record**

Consider safety and confidentiality when recording in notes. Records may be used in future criminal/civil court proceedings and may also be used as part of MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) information.

Be particularly careful if anything is recorded in hand held notes or records that the perpetrator may have access to.

Ensure that you document any disclosures as per your agencies policies.

### **4. Refer**

A large number of victims of domestic abuse never tell anyone what they are experiencing, however if someone discloses domestic abuse to a professional (or even a friend or colleague) encouraging or making a referral to the relevant support services should be done.

Ensure that you action any safeguarding (children and/or adult) procedures as per your agencies policies.

Remember consent of the victim does not need to be obtained in High risk cases where you believe that the victim is at significant risk of harm.

## Domestic Abuse Referral Pathway

Domestic abuse is “Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or who have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender, sexuality or ethnicity. This can encompass but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional”. This also includes honour based violence (HBV), forced marriage and female genital mutilation

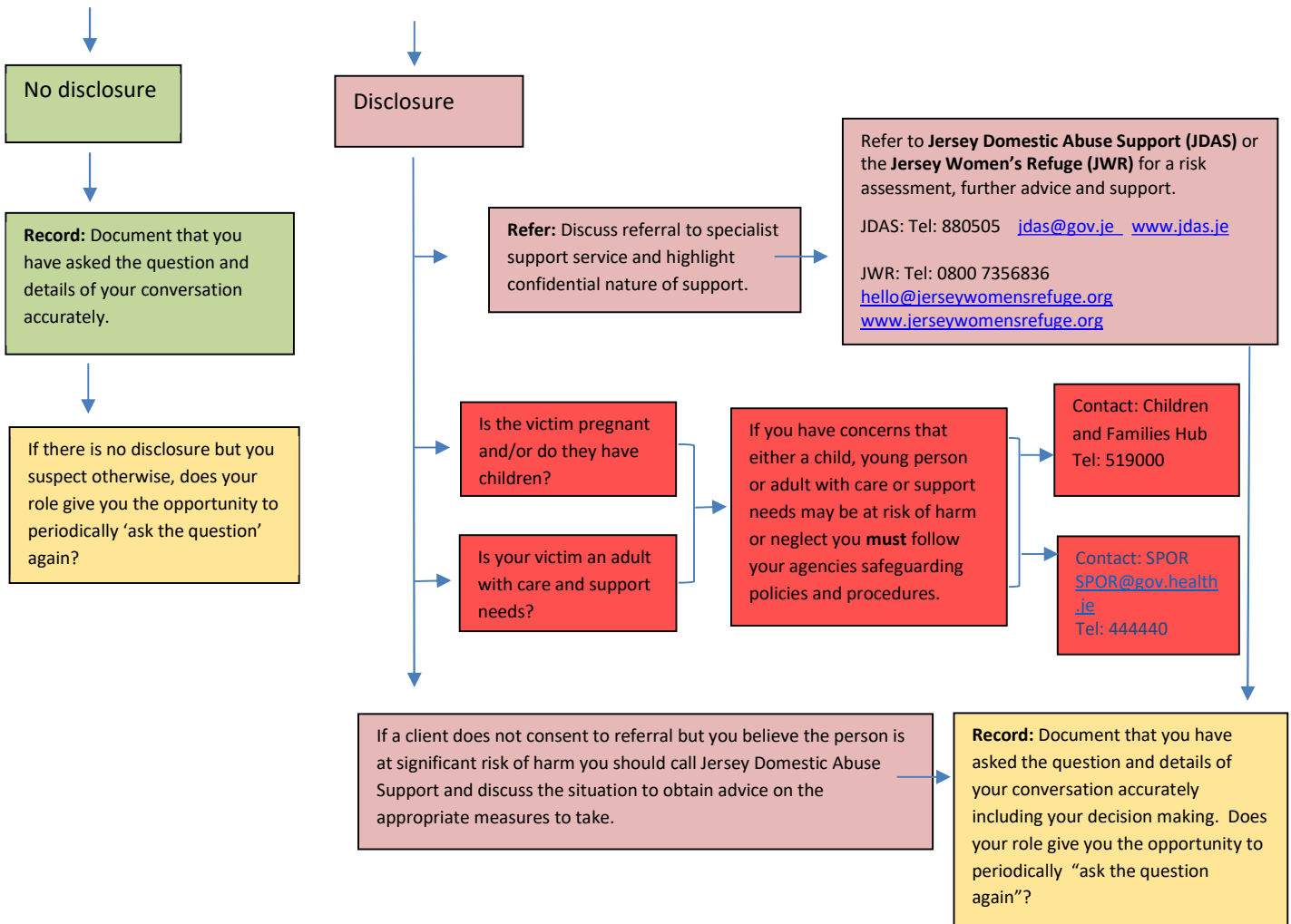
**Recognise:** Be familiar with the signs of domestic abuse and ask all client on contact about their home situation.

**Respond:** Frame the question, validate and address immediate safety concerns.

Example questions:

- Is everything alright at home? How are you feeling?
- Are you getting support from your partner/family members at home?
- Everyone has rows at times, have you seen an increase in rows/arguments? What happens when these occur?
- Do arguments or comments made ever result in you feeling put down or bad about yourself?
- Has anyone ever been violent towards you? Who?
- Do you ever feel frightened or have you ever felt frightened?
- Does your partner and/or family members like to know what you are doing? Who you are speaking to?
- Do they control your access to finances or ability to do what you would like to do?
- Does or has your partner and/or family member ever prevented you from accessing medical support or assistance for care needs?
- You mentioned that your partner and/or family member uses alcohol/drugs/gambles – how do they react when doing this?
- Does your partner pressure you to have sex or perform sexual acts?

**If there is any  
immediate danger call  
999**



## Common behaviours associated with domestic abuse

### Emotional abuse

You can experience abuse and violence without being physically hurt. Emotional abuse does not leave physical scars, but it can have a big impact on a person's mental health and well-being. Someone experiencing emotional abuse can feel anxious, depressed and even suicidal.

Perpetrators of emotional abuse use it to take away a person's independence, confidence and self-esteem. This helps the perpetrator maintain power and control in the relationship. Physically abusive relationships often include aspects of emotional abuse.

The signs of emotional abuse can be difficult to identify, especially because it is non-physical. Emotional abuse includes:

- Blaming a partner for the problems in a relationship
- Constantly comparing them to others to undermine their self-esteem and self-worth
- Usually being in a bad mood
- Intentionally embarrassing them in public
- Name calling
- Yelling, insulting or swearing at them
- Telling them what to wear
- Preventing them from seeing family and friends
- Threatening suicide
- Making them feel guilty when they refuse sex
- Online humiliation and intimidation

Someone experiencing emotional abuse can start to believe what the perpetrator says about them. They may also blame themselves for the abuse. The constant criticism lowers their self-esteem and confidence making it very difficult to leave the relationship.

### **Controlling/coercive behaviour - Be alert to the dangers of controlling behaviour during Covid-19 when victims of domestic abuse are increasingly isolated**

Coercive control seeks to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of their independence and regulating their everyday activity through fear and intimidation.

It creates invisible chains and a sense of fear that pervades all elements of a victim's life.

Indicators of coercive control are where a partner attempts to isolate you from your family and friends, may monitor your time and take control over aspects of your everyday life, such as where you go, who you see, what you can wear and when you can sleep. They may also deprive you of your basic needs such as food or access to medical care.

Abusive partners will also often repeatedly put you down, making you feel worthless and use manipulative language to sow seeds of doubt that makes you question your own memory, perception and sanity.

## **Financial/economic abuse**

Financial abuse can be subtle, with a perpetrator gradually taking control over bank accounts and financial transactions. Financial abuse can also be obvious, violent and threatening. For example, someone may forbid their partner from working or spending their wages.

Financial abuse can leave people without means for basic essentials or access to their own bank account. It can also result in huge debts being built up against their names.

Economic abuse broadens this definition and takes into consideration resources such as food, clothing and transport.

Financial abuse includes:

Someone taking complete control of finances and money, restricting access to bank accounts, providing an inadequate allowance and monitoring what their partner spends money on, forbidding a partner to work, taking a partners pay and not allowing them access to it, preventing them from getting to work by taking their keys or car, identity theft to secure credit, using their credit cards without permission and refusing to work or contribute to household expenses.

## **Sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse is any form of forced or unwanted sexual activity. The perpetrator of sexual abuse may use physical force, make threats or take advantage of a person unable to give consent.

Sexual abuse mainly happens between people who know each other and can occur in the context of domestic abuse. Sexual coercion is particularly common and involves continuing to pressure the victim to have sex after he or she has said no.

Sexual abuse impacts on a person's physical and emotional health. It can lead to long-term mental health issues, including anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Sexual abuse includes:

- Rape
- Deliberately causing pain during sex
- Assaulting the genitals
- Forced sex without protection against pregnancy or STI's
- Forcing someone to perform sexual acts
- Using sexually degrading insults
- Unwanted touching
- Unwanted exposure to pornography
- Sexual jokes
- Withholding sex as a punishment
- Using sex to coerce compliance

## **Physical abuse**

Physical abuse happens when a person uses physical force against another person. Physical abuse can start slowly and inconspicuously, for example with throwing an object or a slap and can often get more intense or worse over time.

A person may experience many different types of physical abuse. Physical abuse includes:

- Hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, hair pulling, biting, pushing.
- Rough handling
- Scalding and burning
- Physical punishments
- Inappropriate use of restraints
- Making someone purposely uncomfortable
- Misuse of medication
- Sleep and food deprivation
- Forced feeding
- Abuse of children or pets
- Destroying property or pets
- Driving dangerously
- Using weapons
- Locking someone out of their house or in their house.

### **Harassment/Stalking**

Harassment and stalking happen when a person is persistently pursued against their will. The perpetrator does this to control, intimidate and create fear.

Stalking and harassment limit a person's freedom and makes them feel that they have lost control of their lives. Some people who have been stalked have been forced to change their lives completely by moving house and changing jobs. Anyone can be a victim of stalking/harassment.

To control, intimidate and create fear in a person a perpetrator may:

- Make repeated phone calls
- Send numerous text messages
- Loiter outside or near a person's home or work
- Leave messages on social networking sites, such as Facebook.
- Leave notes on a person's car
- Leave flowers at a person's home
- Follow or continually stare at the person that they are stalking
- Monitor a person's use of technology, including phone, email and other communications.

### **Online or Digital Abuse**

- Monitoring of social media profiles or emails
- Abuse over social media such as Facebook or Twitter
- Sharing intimate photos/videos without consent
- Spyware or GPS locators