THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Know How: Domestic Abuse

What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is a safeguarding concern and can affect anyone. According to the ONS (2025), around 1 in 4 people have experienced domestic abuse in their lifetime, meaning that in a congregation of 30, it is likely that around 7 people have experienced harm.

Domestic abuse often involves a pattern of abusive behaviour, but it can also be a single incident. It occurs within intimate or family relationships and is rooted in power and control. Abuse may be recent, ongoing or non-recent, and may be disclosed, suspected, partially shared or not reported at all.
Children and young people who see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse are recognised as victims of abuse. Other adults in the household may also be affected.

Domestic abuse does not look the same for everyone. People may experience one or more of the following at the same time:

- **Psychological or emotional abuse:** fear, intimidation, threats or manipulation.
- **Coercive or controlling behaviour:** isolation, monitoring or restriction of choice.
- **Economic abuse:** control of money, work, benefits or access to essentials.
- **Physical abuse:** assaults or threats of violence.
- **Sexual abuse:** sexual coercion, pressure or assault.
- **Tech-facilitated abuse:** monitoring phones, location or messages.

Disclosures are not always direct. Someone may describe impacts or behaviours without naming them as abuse therefore, concerns may be shared informally, indirectly or across multiple conversations over time.

What if Someone Discloses or Shares a Concern?

DO:

- Listen and take concerns seriously. *Allow the person to share in their own words, at their own pace, without judgement or pressing for details.*
- Be clear about your role and limits. *You are there to listen and to ensure they get the right support, not to investigate or have all the answers, being honest about this from the outset builds trust.*
- Prioritise safety. *Think about whether it is safe for them to continue the conversation, to return home, or to be contacted later.*
- Respect choice and autonomy. *Where there is no immediate risk, give the person space to make choices about what support looks like, and avoid taking over or rushing decisions.*
- Be transparent about next steps and information sharing. *Explain honestly what happens next and who will be involved. Concerns should be escalated to a DSO as soon as possible.*

DO NOT:

- Promise confidentiality. *You may need to share information for safeguarding purposes; broken promises can damage trust.*
- Investigate or hold risk alone. *Safeguarding decisions should be shared, recorded, and overseen by Diocesan Safeguarding Officers.*

- Pressure someone to leave, disclose further, reconcile or forgive. *This can increase risk, remove agency and shut down future disclosures. For some people, staying may feel safer than leaving, particularly where coercive control, children, housing or faith are factors.*
- Offer mediation or relationship counselling where abuse is suspected or disclosed.

The *Reporting Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations* Code of Practice supports you to ensure that all safeguarding allegations and concerns are recognised and responded to appropriately.

How do I Know if Someone is at Risk and How do I Escalate?

Risk does not always look the same and you are not expected to have all the answers. If something does not feel right, take it seriously.

Some indicators may suggest increased or immediate risk. These are patterns to be aware of, not a checklist:

- Escalation in frequency or severity of behaviour.
- Expressions of fear or concern for safety.
- Recent separation or attempts to leave.
- Suicidal thoughts or self-harm *(by the person making the disclosure, children or the person causing harm).*
- Pregnancy or major life changes.

If someone is in immediate danger, contact 999.

Who can Help/Working with Other Agencies?

Supporting someone affected by domestic abuse cannot be done by one person or service alone. **Depending on the situation, Diocesan Safeguarding Officers may involve:**

- **Police:** for immediate safety and protective measures.
- **Children and/or Adult Social Care:** to assess risk and support the welfare of children and adults with care needs.
- **Domestic abuse specialist services:** for survivor-led support, advocacy and safety planning.
- **Housing Services:** for emergency accommodation.

You should be clear with the disclosing individual why other services may be involved. Local services will vary by area. Contact your diocese for local referral pathways and resources

How Should I Follow Up Safely and Record Concerns?

Recording concerns is a safeguarding responsibility, it is not optional. Good records help recognise patterns over time, support escalation and ensure nothing is lost. For process requirements, see *Reporting Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations*.

At a minimum record:

- The nature of the disclosure or concern.
- The names of people involved.
- Contact details for the person reporting.
- Whether any other individuals may be at risk.

Follow up contact can increase risk. Always agree a safe method with the person first. Be mindful of shared phones, monitored email accounts or someone else intercepting messages. Do not leave voicemails, texts or emails without consent.

Specialist Services

Specialist services provide support that the Church cannot safely offer alone. PSOs can also contact these services for professional consultation and advice. Use local Diocesan safeguarding contacts first and follow local referral pathways where available.

- **Refuge:** emergency accommodation and specialist support for women and children.
- **Women's Aid:** local domestic abuse services and refuge provision for women and children.
- **Galop:** support for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse.
- **Men's Advice Line:** advice and support for men experiencing domestic abuse.
- **Respond:** support for people with learning disabilities and autism, who have experienced abuse, violence or trauma.
- **Safe Spaces:** free, independent support for survivors of church-related abuse, funded by the Church of England.

Wellbeing Reminder

Supporting someone through a disclosure can be difficult and have a lasting impact. Vicarious trauma and burnout are real risks in safeguarding roles; you do not have to carry this alone. Speak to your DSO or Diocese for support and debrief.