



Top tips on how to work with Domestic Abuse

This guide provides professionals with 10 good practice tips that underpin effective working with domestic abuse cases.

1. Making the connections between adult safeguarding and domestic abuse

- do you and your colleagues know about domestic abuse and how it fits with adult safeguarding
- make sure that you follow your local policies, protocols and procedures for safeguarding adults and children
- use this guide to improve understanding of the issues and develop good practice.

2. What is domestic abuse? Who needs safeguarding? How do they link together? And what does research tell us?

- understand the definitions of safeguarding and domestic abuse, and how they link up for the person that you are supporting
- be alert to patterns of coercive or controlling behaviour, as well as incidents of abuse
- always act to safeguard children who are living with or witnessing domestic abuse
- take account of gender, sexuality and inter-generational issues
- remember that both men and women can be both the victim and perpetrator of domestic abuse.

3. Understanding the impact of domestic abuse

- consider the likely impact of abuse on all adults and children involved with the family
- consider the additional likely impact of abuse on people with additional care and support needs
- consider how these factors might affect the approach in working with the person at risk (and others in the household).

4. Barriers and challenges to ending abusive relationships

- remember that there are many reasons why people may not leave abusive relationships
- additional and specific barriers may be present for ethnic minority people, older people, and people with disabilities
- confidentially asking routine questions about safety can aid disclosure
- accessible information and signposted services about abuse are crucial
- building trust with someone to help them disclose abuse may take several months.

5. Working with people needing care and support who are experiencing domestic abuse

- there are a range of issues to consider, including the needs of a range of groups, people's independence, self-esteem, previous experience of services, and parenting
- taking time to build trust and confidence with the person being abused is important, accepting that they may not be able to describe or disclose all aspects of their situation initially, and that the issues may take time to explore fully
- avoid making assumptions based on stereotypes, particularly around older age, mental health and substance misuse
- there is a risk of serious harm in forced marriage situations where one or both parties have care and support needs
- domestic abuse can involve the wider family and take different forms according to different family dynamics, especially when caring responsibilities are involved.

6. Mental capacity, adult safeguarding and domestic abuse

- the Mental Capacity Act has five key principles, designed to protect and support the person- make sure that you are aware of the principles
- remember an apparently unwise decision may be the result of coercion or controlling behaviour by another person
- Independent Mental Capacity Advocates (IMCAs) can support the abused person
- IMCAs may not be specially trained in domestic abuse, but they can work alongside Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) or other workers from a specialist domestic abuse agency.

7. Safe enquiries

- follow the principles of safe enquiry and take protective measures to ensure that any discussions with potential victims of abuse are conducted in a safe environment
- understand that victims of abuse may be reluctant to disclose what is happening to them, but that the conversation may be helping them to understand their situation better and build up trust
- ask direct questions but make that you do so in a safe environment
- keep good records of any discussions and interventions
- follow local policies, protocols and procedures at all times.

8. Assessing and managing the risks of domestic abuse in safeguarding circumstances

- understand how coercive and controlling behaviours may inhibit people disclosing or revealing the extent of domestic abuse
- understand local policies and procedures for safeguarding and risk assessments
- listen to and communicate respect towards the adult with care and support needs who is experiencing domestic abuse. Ensure they are at the centre of decision-making
- be aware of and vigilant against the potential of 'the rule of optimism', when professionals may place undue confidence in the capacity of families to care effectively and safely, affecting professional perceptions and recognition of risk of harm, abuse or neglect
- take any immediate protective measures that are needed
- understand how your local arrangements work in relation to safeguarding and Multi- Agency Risk Assessment Conferences
- use risk assessment forms as tools to aid professional judgement, not as ends in themselves
- using safe enquiry, work with the person at risk to ensure their experiences are central to your risk assessment
- collate information about static risk factors, as they are the most reliable indication of long-term risk
- use professional judgement in risk assessment as everybody's circumstances are different
- gain support from local specialist domestic abuse agencies; they are experts in risk assessment and management.

9. Domestic abuse support services and legal action

- ensure that you develop safeguarding and support arrangements that are personalised to the person you are working with
- there are many types of national and local support schemes for people experiencing domestic abuse, including places of immediate safety
- be aware of the types of legal actions and sanctions (criminal and civil) that can be used in safeguarding and domestic abuse.
- know where to go to get good legal advice, both for the person you are supporting, and to advise you of the options available
- ensure that information and advice is provided in an accessible way.

10. Working with perpetrators of domestic abuse

- carry out safe enquiry and risk assessment for every person at risk of abuse, whatever the circumstances of each individual
- be aware of the need for specialist intervention programmes for perpetrators, which challenge their behaviour and offer appropriate support
- do not refer perpetrators to interventions such as anger management, generic counselling or mediation between the perpetrator and victim
- if it is within your role to have direct contact with a perpetrator and to speak about domestic abuse, be clear with them about the unacceptability of abuse, their accountability for it, and the limits on confidentiality
- if someone is abusive or neglectful and they themselves have care and support needs, make sure they have access to information and advice, assessment and support
- ensure professionals working with the perpetrator and those working with the victim are part of a 'virtual team' and are actively sharing information relevant to delivering the safeguarding plan
- be aware of and vigilant against the potential of 'the rule of optimism', when professionals may place undue confidence in the capacity of families to care effectively and safely, affecting professional perceptions and recognition of risk of harm, abuse or neglect.

Safety, Enablement, Empowerment and Prevention, at the centre of everything we do