



# What Can I Do to Help Someone Suffering from Domestic Abuse In My Block?

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**Domestic abuse is a difficult issue that affects many people directly or indirectly. If you or anyone you know needs help, please see the support numbers at the end of this article.**

**D**omestic abuse is a widespread crime that mostly takes place in people's homes, behind closed doors. Traditionally its hidden nature caused domestic abuse to be deemed a private matter, and for others not to interfere. In recent years, awareness of domestic abuse has risen, in particular since the COVID-19 pandemic when multiple lockdowns led to worrying spikes of domestic abuse levels.

In England and Wales, the passing of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has been instrumental in raising awareness of domestic abuse as a public issue that requires everyone working together to tackle and prevent it. This is particularly relevant for professionals in the residential property sector as they might come into direct contact with victims and survivors at home, where they are most at risk of harm. The [Femicide census 2020](#) found that 70% of women are killed within their homes. Whilst home should be a place of safety, this is the opposite for those experiencing domestic abuse.

## **What is domestic abuse?**

Domestic abuse is abusive behaviour that is perpetrated between people who are personally interconnected through intimate or family relationships. It can happen between partners or ex-partners, family members for example siblings or extended family, in-laws, or also between adult children and their parents.

Domestic abuse can include physical

violence, but in most cases, it is a lot more complex than this and might include emotional and/or psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial or economic abuse, harassment or stalking.

Coercive control, a behaviour where the perpetrator uses threats or intimidation and fear to control what their victim does, is often a key element of the abuse. A high level of coercive control is a risk indicator of domestic homicide, making it very difficult and dangerous for victims to leave their abuser.

## **Who is most at risk?**

Domestic abuse is a form of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) that is disproportionately experienced by women and disproportionately perpetrated by men. It is important to note that men can also suffer from domestic abuse, and women can be perpetrators, although on average women are more likely to experience the most severe forms of domestic abuse with one in four women in the UK experiencing domestic abuse in their lifetimes. On average in England and Wales, the police take 100 calls per hour related to domestic abuse, and two women a week are killed by their partner or ex-partner.

It is also important to note that anyone can experience domestic abuse, regardless of sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, age or other characteristics. However not everyone has the same

resources and support networks, and this will greatly impact individuals' help-seeking behaviour. It is therefore crucial to keep a non-judgemental and believing approach when speaking to anyone experiencing domestic abuse.

## **Why is it relevant to property management professionals?**

Considering the widespread prevalence of domestic abuse, anyone with responsibilities for residential buildings and properties might come across a resident suffering from domestic abuse. This might not come from the victim themselves, as they might feel scared or ashamed to talk about the situation, but neighbours in the building might overhear or witness arguments, or you might notice signs of abuse during a site visit, such as a forced door or a broken window.

As an external person, it can be difficult to know what to do. Each situation is different and complex, and you might be worried about doing the wrong thing, or to make matters worse for the victim. However, the consequences of doing nothing can be dangerous, and no one wants to sit with knowing they could have done something to help prevent the abuse which might escalate to domestic homicide.

As part of the [Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance \(DAHA\)](#), the domestic abuse charity [Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse](#) (Standing

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Together) has produced numerous guidance documents to support professionals to better understand domestic abuse, and equip them to offer a safe and efficient response. The most relevant guidance for the property management sector is the [Domestic abuse guidance for block managers](#).

DAHA can also support social housing providers and local authorities to improve their organisational response to domestic abuse through an established set of standards and an [accreditation process](#).

### **How can I help?**

We do not expect you to be an expert on domestic abuse or to support victims directly, but we consider that anyone with responsibility in a residential building is in a unique position to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and provide a helpful response that can save lives.

### **Signs of domestic abuse can include:**

- Residents reporting noise nuisance or anti-social behaviour including issues of substance misuse
- Damage to the property, particularly doors or windows
- Requests for lock changes or enhanced security for doors and external gates
- Police callouts
- Arrears in payments of rent or service charge, often linked with economic abuse
- Residents reporting concerns about a neighbour

- A resident with unexplained injuries
- A sense that something isn't quite right, such as a resident who is not allowed to leave their property, or who looks frightened by someone in their household.

If you identify some of these signs, do not ignore them! Be aware that a lot of these signs are the same as anti-social behaviour (ASB), and domestic abuse is often mistaken for anti-social behaviour. If you approach a victim of domestic abuse from an ASB enforcement perspective, they might be scared to speak to you about what is really happening.

If you believe someone is experiencing domestic abuse, you should ask them about the situation in a safe environment, making sure they are alone and explaining that you are here to help. Our [guidance for Block Managers](#) includes more details and practical tips on how to safely ask someone about domestic abuse, and how to respond safely if they disclose abuse.

Always believe and listen to someone disclosing abuse without judgement, and tell them that support is available. It is also important not to confront the perpetrator directly or tell them that you know about the situation. This could put the victim at greater risk.

### **Signposting to specialist services**

Managing risk around domestic abuse is complex. The most effective help you can provide to someone experiencing domestic abuse is to give them the contact number of a domestic abuse helpline, or the contact number for their local domestic abuse service.

The National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by the charity [Refuge](#) is a free and confidential service open 24-hours. The number is 0808 2000 247. Helpline workers are trained to respond to victims and any professional or third-party seeking advice about domestic abuse.

### **What more can I do?**

You can implement prevention measures such as displaying posters or leaflets of domestic abuse services on noticeboards in communal areas, and by sharing information via resident newsletters or other communications channels. [Refuge](#) provides posters with the National Helpline number to download from their website [here](#).

With regard to block management, you should also ensure the building entry

systems are always safe, with light and, where possible, a video intercom to see who is accessing the building. This will help victims and survivors who have separated but where their ex-partners continue to stalk and harass them.

### **Key considerations**

- Domestic abuse is a widespread crime that has devastating consequences for victims and their families, as well as local communities.
- For victims and survivors of domestic abuse, home is often the most dangerous place. This makes domestic abuse by its very nature a housing issue.
- As a professional with responsibility in a residential building, you are in a unique position to spot the signs of domestic abuse and provide a helpful response.
- Separating from an abusive relationship is the biggest homicide risk for victims and their children as it can trigger an escalation in the perpetrator's abusive behaviour.
- Believing the victim and signposting to specialist support can save lives.

### **Domestic Abuse Support helplines**

- **National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Refuge** 0808 2000 247
- **National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Galop** 0800 999 5428
- **Respect Helpline (for those who harm)** 0808 8024040
- **If someone is at immediate risk of harm, call the police on 999**

**For more information, contact:**

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