

STANDING TOGETHER AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE

Domestic Abuse Guidance for Private Landlords



**STANDING
TOGETHER**

against domestic abuse

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Contents

What is domestic abuse?

p.3

What can I do within my role as private landlord?

p.5

1. Make it your business
2. Identify the signs of domestic abuse
3. Ask about the abuse...
4. ... and provide a safe response
5. Provide helpline and local support numbers
6. Allow security measures to the property
7. Consider flexibility to the tenancy terms
8. Share this guidance and attend training
9. In an emergency

Domestic abuse helpline numbers

p.14

About this guidance

This guidance was developed by Standing Together and the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) to provide landlords in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) with information and advice on how to support tenants experiencing domestic abuse so that they maintain stable housing, live safely and overcome abuse and its harmful aspects.

This guidance does not presume that landlords should provide in-depth support to tenants experiencing domestic abuse, but it recognises that may be the first and only community members to whom victims may disclose abuse. This places landlords in a unique and vital position to identify domestic abuse and provide a safe and effective response that is within their professional remit.

What is domestic abuse?

Under the terms of the **Domestic Abuse Act 2021**, domestic abuse is defined as:

The behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if —

- (a) A and B are each **aged 16 or over** and are **personally connected** to each other, and
- (b) the **behaviour is abusive**.

The behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following—

- (a) physical or sexual abuse;
- (b) violent or threatening behaviour;
- (c) controlling or coercive behaviour;
- (d) economic abuse;
- (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse;

and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

“**Economic abuse**” means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B’s ability to —

- (a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
- (b) obtain goods or services.

The behaviour of A may be abusive “towards” B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B’s child).

Two people are “**personally connected**” to each other if any of the following applies —

- (a) they are, or have been, married to each other;
- (b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- (c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see subsection (2));
- (g) they are relatives.

A “child” means a person under the age of 18 years and they are considered to be a victim of domestic abuse where they —

- (a) see or hear, or experience the effects of, the abuse, and
- (b) are related to A or B.

Who can experience domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a serious and widespread crime that can affect anyone. In the majority of cases, it is experienced by women and perpetrated by men, but it's important to remember that **anyone can experience domestic abuse**, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, religion, class or background.

Individuals from minoritised communities, such as LGBTQ+ people, older people, disabled people, and individuals from Black, Asian, or other minority ethnic backgrounds are just as likely, and in some cases more likely, to experience domestic abuse but are less likely to access specialist services and support.

For more information about the forms of domestic abuse, please go to the Government's webpage on <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help>

A note on language

Throughout this guidance, we refer to people experiencing domestic abuse as victims or survivors, and people causing the abuse as perpetrators.



What can I do within my role as a private landlord?

1. Decide to make it your business

The first step is to acknowledge that domestic abuse is your business, because **you might have a tenant experiencing domestic abuse in your property.**

As a landlord, you are in a **unique position** to spot the signs of domestic abuse such as rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, damage to the property or broken doors or windows. Your response and actions, even small, can be **life-saving**.

Domestic abuse is a hidden crime that thrives in silence. Every organisation and individual has a vital role to play to address and prevent it.

On average in England and Wales:



100 calls per hour
to the police are related to domestic abuse



2 women a week
are killed by their partner or ex-partner

What are the key signs of domestic abuse?

2. Identify the signs

Domestic abuse is just as prevalent in the private rented sector as in any other tenure of housing. As a landlord, you might be the only person to know about specific signs of domestic abuse that are linked to a tenant's housing circumstances.

The key signs of domestic abuse that you might come across include:

- **Noise nuisance** such as shouting or arguments reported by neighbours
- **Anti-social behaviour**, such as noise complaints, aggressive behaviour, and alcohol or drug use by the perpetrator, or by the victim/survivor as a coping mechanism
- **Property damage and regular repairs**, such as broken doors or smashed windows, holes in the wall or damage to the furniture or appliances
- **Requests for lock changes or security measures**
- **Rent arrears**, often as a result of economic abuse from the perpetrator
- Signs of **physical abuse** such as bruises or 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

A lot of these signs are the same as anti-social behaviour (ASB), and domestic abuse is often mistaken for ASB. In fact, survivors are four times more likely than the general tenant population to receive ASB complaints. If any of these signs are happening, it is vital to use a 'domestic abuse lens' and consider what you can do to help.

Look out for the signs of domestic abuse, and trust your gut instinct. If something doesn't feel quite right, there's probably more to it.

If you are concerned about someone

3. Ask about the abuse...

If you believe that your tenant may be experiencing domestic abuse, you should ask them about their situation. It is then up to them to decide whether to tell you, and that's ok.

It's important to make sure that your tenant is **alone** and **safe** before speaking to them about the abuse, especially when you are speaking over the phone. To first establish if they are safe to speak, ask closed questions which allow them to give 'yes' or 'no' answers, such as '**Are you alone?**', or '**Is it safe to speak with you right now about your relationship?**'

Many victims/survivors may find it difficult to share their experience of domestic abuse, because they may fear they won't be believed or they'll be at risk of further harm. They might also fear of being evicted or being asked to pay for the damages resulting from the abuse. It is our responsibility as professionals to identify people experiencing domestic abuse and offer support within the remit of our roles.

Here are some ways to show them that it is okay to talk with you about the abuse:

- 'I've received some noise complaints from the neighbours and wanted to check whether you are safe at home and if there is any way I can help you.'
- 'I've recently noticed some damage to the property and wanted to check whether you were safe and if there is any way I can help you.'
- 'You mentioned that you're scared of your partner/he won't let you leave the house/he's hurt(ing) you. Would you like to tell me more about that so that I can see if there is any way for me to help?'

How do I respond to a disclosure?

4. ...and provide a safe response

If a resident (or anyone) tells you they are experiencing domestic abuse to you, it is important to provide a safe and helpful response:

Do

- ✓ **Listen** to them without judgement: never blame them for the abuse
- ✓ **Believe** them
- ✓ **Validate** what they are telling you. For example '**this isn't your fault**', '**you are not alone**'
- ✓ Tell them that **support is available**, and give them contact details of specialist services (see contacts at the end of this guidance)

Don't

- ✗ Don't confront the abuser. This could increase the risk for the victim and their children.
- ✗ Don't contact the police or other services **unless** the victim asks you to, or if there is an immediate risk of harm (see 'In an emergency' section)

Recognising disclosures

It is possible that a tenant may want to tell you about the abuse, however they may not say 'I am experiencing domestic abuse'. They might say things like:

- I don't feel safe at home
- I feel scared/frightened of my (ex) partner/family member
- My (ex) partner/family member won't let me leave the house
- My (ex) partner/family member is hurting me

Signposting to specialist services

5. Provide contact for helplines or local domestic abuse services

As a landlord, you are not expected to provide specialist support to tenants experiencing domestic abuse, however you can give them information for the professionals who can.

If a tenant tells you they are experiencing domestic abuse, give them the helpline numbers at the end of this guidance, or search for their local domestic abuse service.

The **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** run by 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.

Each local authority commissions at least one domestic abuse service to support people locally. You can find a local service by searching on the local Council website, or googling 'domestic abuse service in [enter location]'.

Tenancy starter packs

Include **information about domestic abuse helplines** in your tenancy starter packs that all new tenants receive. This should include at least the **National Domestic Abuse Helpline**, and if possible information for the tenant's local domestic abuse service.

You can incorporate this information within other information you usually provide on local services, or you can print out the last page of this guidance and add it to other documents you'd usually provide as part of a new tenancy.

Property safety

6. Allow enhanced security measures to the property

Your tenant might request a change of locks or to install additional security measures to prevent their abuser from entering the property. This could be after the perpetrator left the property, sometimes due to being arrested or following a court order, or after separation if the perpetrator knows the address and tries to continue the abuse.

Sanctuary Scheme

Most local authorities offer a **free service** to secure the properties of victims and survivors of domestic abuse, often referred to as '**Sanctuary Scheme**'. This can include changing locks or installing additional security measures to the doors or windows.

The victim/survivor or their support worker can request this service themselves, but they will need your **approval as landlord**. It is worth knowing that the Sanctuary Scheme provider can remove these additional measures for free at the end of the tenancy.

For any property you rent out, make sure that the entry systems are always safe. This can include providing a **peephole or video entry system, external lights** to see who is trying to enter the property, and **prioritising repairs** to any external door or window.



Remember that a damaged door or window could be a sign of domestic abuse.



Tenancy flexibility

7. Consider flexibility to the tenancy terms

In the first instance, you will need to discuss with the victim/survivor to establish exactly **what they want or need** regarding their housing situation. Options to consider will depend on their contract agreement (sole or joint tenancy, fixed-term or periodic), and can include:

- **Flexibility to end the tenancy:** if the victim/survivor wants to move out early because they don't feel safe in the property, consider if you can offer flexibility around the notice period, or waiving fees associated with terminating the tenancy early.
- **Ending a joint tenancy to start a sole tenancy:** if the perpetrator has moved out and the victim/survivor wants to stay in the property, discuss the option of terminating the joint tenancy and offering a new sole tenancy.
- **Payment flexibility:** if your tenant has rent arrears or is liable for damages as a result of the abuse, consider if you could agree for a payment plan over time, or if the perpetrator could be pursued for these payments. Some landlords are able to cover the cost of damages through their housing insurance.
- **Affordability:** where needed, encourage your tenant to access support from Citizen Advice Bureau or Shelter for advice on benefits and how to afford rent.

Safety considerations on joint tenancies

In cases of joint tenancies, watch out for the following:

- The perpetrator might try to end a periodic joint tenancy without the victim's consent or knowledge. This can place the victim at risk of homelessness.
- Be aware that the perpetrator can name themselves as lead tenant with the deposit protection scheme to get the full deposit at the end of the tenancy.

Raising awareness

8. Share this guidance and attend a domestic abuse awareness course

There is not enough awareness of domestic abuse in the private rented sector, so help spread the word by sharing this guidance with your colleagues and networks.

If you rent through a **lettings agency**, ask them what procedures they have in place regarding domestic abuse. Clarify with them what you are willing to do as a landlord to support your tenants, such as allowing additional security measures when requested (see sections above).

Consider attending a domestic abuse awareness course by contacting your Council or local domestic abuse service, or contact Standing Together for bespoke training.

Consider how you can help raising awareness about domestic abuse within your role. Anyone coming to contact with people's homes might come across signs of domestic abuse. Making it everyone's business will save lives.



In an emergency

Call for help

If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to the victim, children, perpetrator or anyone else in the household, encourage them to **call 999 immediately**.

If you can't get in contact with them, or if they are unable to call the police when there is an immediate risk of harm, get as much information as you can regarding their current location and contact details and then call 999 to report the concern.

The Police has a **Silent Solution System** when you can't speak: **call 999 and press 55** when prompted. If you can speak to the victim safely, inform them of this.

Safeguarding children

If you think children are at risk of harm, this is a safeguarding concern. You do not have a statutory duty to safeguard children, but the government strongly advises that safeguarding is **everybody's business**.

Domestic abuse profoundly impacts children who may witness the abuse or be directly harmed by the perpetrator. Simply living in a home that is dominated by fear and control is detrimental to children's wellbeing. If you have any concerns that there are children who may be at risk of harm you can seek advice by calling your Council's **Children Safeguarding Team**, or the **Childline** free helpline on 0800 1111.

Domestic abuse helplines

National Domestic Abuse Helplines - Freephone 24-hour:

- England: 0808 2000 247 (run by Refuge)
- Northern Ireland: 0808 802 1414
- Scotland: 0800 027 1234
- Wales: 0808 8010 800

Women's Aid live chat service: <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/>

Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327 (for men experiencing domestic abuse)

Respect: 0808 802 4040

(for anyone worried that they may be harming someone else)

Galop: 0800 999 5428

(for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people experiencing domestic abuse)

Forced Marriage Unit: 0207 008 0151

Karma Nirvana: 0800 5999 247

(for anyone at risk of so called 'honour-based abuse')

National Stalking Helpline: 0808 802 0300

Rights of Women: 020 7251 6577 (free legal advice for women)

Women's Aid directory of services:

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-directory/>