



# One minute guide

## Domestic Violence - Risk at the point of separation

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### What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence (also known as domestic abuse) ([guide](#)) refers to any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. Most reported incidents relate to women and girls, but this is not always the case.

Domestic violence can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological; physical; sexual; financial; and emotional.

### What are the risks at the point of separation?

It is often assumed that a victim choosing to separate from an abusive partner or leave an abusive home will reduce the risk to them and their children of further harm.

However, evidence from research and surveys of victims indicates that the risk of further violence and harm actually **increases** at the point at which a victim leaves a perpetrator.

A study of 200 women's experiences of domestic abuse commissioned by Women's Aid (Humphreys & Thiara, 2002) found that 76% of separated women had experienced post-separation verbal and emotional abuse and violence, including:

- 41% subjected to serious threats towards themselves or their children;
- 23% subjected to physical violence;
- 6% subjected to sexual violence; and
- 36% stated that this violence was ongoing.

For 60% of the women in the study, fears that they or their children would be killed by the perpetrator had motivated their decision to leave the abusive relationship.

There is evidence that the risk of domestic homicide is increased post-separation. In Leeds, separation has been a factor in a significant number of domestic homicides (more than half) in recent years.

For more information about themes identified from domestic homicides in Leeds, please see the guide ([LINK TBC](#)) on Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs), and the DHR overview reports on the Leeds Domestic Violence and Abuse [website](#).



## How should practitioners support victims and families dealing with increased risks at the point of separation?

There are a number of ways in which practitioners can support victims and families:

Recognise that separation can be a **long, gradual process** involving a number of incremental steps, and does not just relate to victims or perpetrators leaving the family home. Steps can include the first time a victim discloses the abuse, the first time the police are called, and when a victim first decides that the relationship is over. It is important that practitioners recognise that the victim **may be at increased risk of harm** at any of these points;

Talk to victims about the increased risks associated with separation, and work with the victim (and family and perpetrator, where safe and appropriate) to **plan the safest way of separating**. Practitioners can use tools such as the DASH risk assessment (see the related documents section of this [web page](#)) to help them understand the risks victims are experiencing;

Agree with the victim **what information should be shared** and with whom. If the victim does not consent to information sharing, discuss this with your manager or safeguarding lead. In high risk cases, you may need to share information without consent;

Stay in touch with the victim and/ or perpetrator to assess ongoing risk, and be **persistent in attempting to re-engage** with them if they start to disengage from the support offered. This pattern can be observed in cases which are complex and/ or where victims or perpetrators are particularly vulnerable; and

Offer **practical support** if appropriate, e.g. helping victims and/ or perpetrators to explore alternative housing options.

## What support is available for domestic violence victims in Leeds?

Leeds Domestic Violence Service operates a 24 hour helpline for victims of domestic abuse and violence, available on tel: 0113 2460401.

There is a wealth of information and advice available on the Leeds Domestic Violence and Abuse [website](#) for people experiencing domestic violence in Leeds, including local and national helplines and information for specific groups and communities, e.g. victims in particular faith communities, victims in same-sex relationships and men who are victims of domestic abuse.

## Key contacts or for more information

For more information, please see the [practitioner pages](#) of the Leeds Domestic Violence and Abuse website, and other relevant one minute guides: [Domestic Violence and Children's Services](#); [Daily Domestic Violence Meeting](#); [Coercive Control Offence](#); Domestic Homicide Reviews ([guide](#)) and the Domestic Violence Breakthrough Project ([guide](#)).