



One minute guide

Domestic violence and abuse - Risk at the point of separation

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What is domestic violence and abuse?

[Domestic violence](#) and abuse refers to any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, [coercive](#) or threatening behaviour, abuse or violence between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

Whilst both men and women may experience incidents of domestic violence and abuse, women are much more likely to be seriously hurt or killed than male victims of domestic abuse. Through the introduction of the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#), children and young people are now recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right.

Domestic abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: coercive control; psychological; emotional; physical; sexual; harassment and stalking; financial or economic; online or digital; spiritual and religious.

More information about the definition and types of domestic abuse can be found in the [2022 domestic abuse statutory guidance](#), published by the Home Office.

What are the risks at the point of separation?

Leaving an abusive relationship is a process that can be scary, complicated, and overwhelming. The victim-survivor may in fact attempt to leave their abuser/s many times before they are finally able to end the relationship and get away.

It is often assumed that any victim-survivors choosing to separate from an abusive partner, family member or an abusive home will reduce the risk of further harm to them and their children. However, evidence from research and surveys of victim-survivors indicates that the risk of further violence and harm actually increases at the point at which a victim-survivor leaves an abuser/s.

There is evidence that the risk of domestic homicide also increases once a victim-survivor leaves the relationship. In Leeds, separation has been a significant factor in the majority of domestic homicides in recent years.

For more information about themes identified from domestic homicide reviews in Leeds, please see the guide on [Domestic Homicide Reviews \(DHRs\)](#), and you can request a copy of DHR overview reports via

SaferLeedsSafeguardingandDomesticViolenceTeam@leeds.gov.uk

How should practitioners support victim-survivors and families dealing with increased risks at the point of separation?

There are a number of ways in which practitioners can support victim-survivors and families:

Recognise that separation can be a **long, gradual process** and risk is dynamic, and therefore risk should be assessed at regular intervals. Practitioners can use tools such as the [DASH \(Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment\) risk assessment](#) to help them understand the risks victim-survivors are experiencing.

Talk to victim-survivors about the increased risks associated with separation, and work with them to **plan the safest way of separating**. Offer practical and emotional support if appropriate. For example, helping victims-survivors to explore alternative housing options or signposting them to specialist domestic abuse services.

Discuss **safety planning** with the victim-survivor, such as ensuring they have a charged mobile phone, storing a packed emergency bag with essentials (e.g. clothing, medication, toiletries), setting aside a small amount of money for travel and having a plan of a safe place to go in an emergency.

Stay in touch with the victim-survivor and/ or abuser to assess ongoing risk and discuss safety planning measures.

What support is available 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 Service [website](#) for people experiencing domestic abuse 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.

Further 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](#); [Coercive Control Offence](#); [Leeds Domestic Violence Service](#) and [Domestic Homicide Reviews](#).

Leeds City Council has a [domestic abuse webpage](#) containing useful information, including how practitioners can make a referral to [MARAC \(Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference\)](#) if they are working with a victim-survivor of domestic abuse, and hosting the [Leeds Domestic Abuse Strategy \(2023-2028\)](#).