

Domestic abuse guidance for contact staff and community volunteers

We are aware that the current lockdown conditions created by the Coronavirus pandemic, particularly the isolation of families, could lead to domestic abuse.

The isolation of families, while necessary to contain the spread of the virus, could exacerbate domestic abuse leaving adults and children, who are victims of abuse, locked in with their perpetrators.

It is important that we can recognise and respond to this risk and as a volunteer on the front line, you could help a victim of domestic abuse get the support they need.

DOMESTIC ABUSE

SUPPORT SERVICES IN BEXLEY

Advice and support services in Bexley

*Don't suffer in silence;
if you're in an abusive
relationship seek help*



www.bexleydomesticabuseservices.org.uk

What is domestic abuse?

An incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16+ who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender of sexual orientation.

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to:

- ▶ psychological
- ▶ physical
- ▶ sexual
- ▶ financial (economic)
- ▶ emotional

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation or religion.

How could Domestic Abuse come to my attention?

Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse and as a volunteer or contact centre caller you may come into contact with individuals and families in which you recognise the signs of abuse.

You may be in a position to raise awareness of your concerns to others, or signpost victims to agencies who can provide them with support and ensure they get the help they need when they need it.

Your understanding and response could make the difference to someone living with domestic abuse and possibly safeguard a victim and children from significant harm.



Spotting the signs: some of the signs of domestic abuse may include:

- ▶ Physical signs: victim and or/children may have physical injuries, be wearing clothes that don't seem suitable for the weather (e.g. long sleeves, very covered up), poor hygiene or looking unkempt, neglected or malnourished.
- ▶ Behaviour: victim can't make decisions without the perpetrator, has no access to money, is not allowed to leave the property to get food, medicine or access to medical treatment, not allowed speak or make eye contact. Perpetrator is openly controlling, or aggressive to you, the victim or children. Victim and/or children are visibly frightened.
- ▶ The property: recent lock changes, damage to front door or recent repairs, locks on the outside of internal doors, holes in walls, damage to doors and walls. Strict rules about the victim using electricity or heating. The perpetrator may tell the victim to keep the house clean and tidy so that authorities don't get suspicious.
- ▶ Noise: reports of persistent arguing, shouting and screaming. Neighbour reports sounds of distress from occupants. Unusual banging and sounds of things being broken. Banging on doors and windows to be let in or out. Regular sounds of children crying and sounding in distress. Shouting in the background when you are making calls.
- ▶ Your judgement: a lot of the time there are no signs of domestic abuse or you may question whether you are reading into things. You may have a feeling that something is wrong or may be unsure about making assumptions. Don't ignore your suspicions - many cases of domestic abuse are identified through judgement alone.

What should I do?

- ▶ If you have concerns about their immediate safety, call **999** straight away.
- ▶ Advise them they can leave the property if they do not feel safe, they can go to their local supermarket and ask to use the phone to call police or Solace
- ▶ Use closed questions to allow one word answers from the survivor. For example “Is it safe to talk?” “Are you in danger?”
- ▶ If you suspect the survivor isn’t able to talk safely, give them a line to end the call, e.g. “If it isn’t safe to speak repeat after me - I’m sorry Sam isn’t here you’ve got the wrong number”
- ▶ If there is a safe opportunity (not with the perpetrator present) share the Solace duty line **020 31984 659** (9am to 5pm)
- ▶ email: bexley.community@solacewomensaid.org
- ▶ If they are in danger and unable to talk on the phone, advise them to call **999** and then press **55** when prompted. This will transfer the call to the relevant police force who will assist them without them having to speak.

DON'T

- Confront the abuser
- Ask the person what is going on if they are not alone
- Try to offer solutions

To report a concern about an adult at risk: on **0208 303 7777** or email screeners@bexley.gov.uk

To report a concern about a child:

Telephone: MASH Daytime hours (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm) **020 3045 5440**.

Out of hours (5pm to 9am Monday to Friday and 24 hour cover at weekends) 020 8303 7777 or **020 8303 7171**

Childrensocialcare.admin@bexley.gov.uk

Solace

- Provide advice, support and safety planning around domestic abuse.
- Solace provide support regardless of gender or sexuality.
- Duty line is open from 9am to 5pm - We are able to take telephone or email referrals.

Bexley Solace Duty Line: **020 31984 659** (9am to 5pm)

Email: Bexley.community@solacewomensaid.org

Other useful contacts -

The National Domestic Abuse helpline is run by Refuge and open 24/7 on **0800 2000 247**. They also have an online form to request a call back at a safe time. <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/>

www.bexleydomesticabuseservices.org.uk