

## **Covid-19 Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence**

### **Guidance for Volunteers**

#### **Recognising and responding to domestic abuse and sexual violence**

This leaflet has been produced in response to concerns and queries being raised by volunteers who have been aware of, or concerned about domestic abuse in households being visited, or individuals they are in contact with.

A common concern is feeling like you don't know enough to respond well, but **simply listening can help someone to break the silence around their situation.**

People who've experienced domestic abuse or sexual violence say that **opportunities to talk, along with emotional and practical support about where to go for help are most helpful**, particularly when offered by someone they trust.

There is no expectation that you will do more than that. However, if you have significant concerns, please speak with your Volunteer Co-ordinator/manager.

**Immediate risks should be reported to the Police on 999**, who are still prioritising domestic abuse and sexual violence during this period.

Domestic abuse is defined by the Government as any incident 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. It includes psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse, as well as 'honour'-based violence and forced marriage.

Sexual violence refers to any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic someone's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm, or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.

## Asking about domestic abuse and sexual violence

**Services can help people to talk about domestic abuse and sexual violence, to know they are not alone and to feel that they will be believed**

Asking about a person's experiences in their relationships and recognising the signs of possible domestic abuse and sexual violence are the first steps in making sure they receive the right help and support. For more information on domestic abuse and sexual violence please see <http://safercornwall.co.uk/what-we-do/dasv-hub/> and [Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence- Routine Enquiry](#)

If you are concerned they may be experiencing domestic abuse or sexual violence, offer to talk privately with them somewhere that they feel safe.

Ask sensitive questions that help the person talk about their experiences

Many people will be worried about sharing what is happening to them. Your response can help them know that they are not alone and to feel that they will be believed.

"Domestic abuse" and "domestic violence" are labels that many people struggle to identify with because they feel these terms don't represent their experiences – particularly the control and coercion, and the psychological, emotional, sexual and financial abuse they have experienced.

So, start conversations gently, conveying your concern. You could ask about things you have noticed, something like: "Are you OK?" or "I'm worried about you, you seem scared."

You seem upset/anxious, is everything alright at home?

Do you need to access to more support?

Do you ever feel frightened of your partner, or anyone else at home?

Is there control/abuse in your relationship?

How you then respond to any disclosure really matters. People expect to be criticised or blamed. It can be hard not to offer strong opinions about the relationship or the person behaving abusively, but these responses tend to close conversations down.

Instead, try to listen with a supportive attitude and an open mind. **The important things to convey are that you believe the person, they are not to blame for the abuse, that you are concerned and worried about them and that you want to help.**

For more guidance and advice on what to look for and how to ask someone if they need help please see [Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence- Routine Enquiry](#) **You can also go to [saferfutures.org.uk](https://saferfutures.org.uk) or you can call Safer Futures on 0300 777 4777 for further advice from our specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence service.**

## **Responding to domestic abuse and sexual violence**

**Everyone involved in situations of domestic abuse and sexual violence should be offered support.**

If a person makes a disclosure of domestic abuse or sexual violence, their safety and the safety of others, including any children who may be affected, is the first priority. **If you have concerns that someone is in immediate danger call 999.**

Share information about specialist services and offer a referral:

### **Domestic abuse - Safer Futures –**

**Helpline:** 0300 777 4777

**Email:** [saferfutures@firstlight.org.uk](mailto:saferfutures@firstlight.org.uk)

**Website:** <https://saferfutures.org.uk/>

### **Rape and sexual assault - Sexual Assault Referral Centre –**

**Helpline:** 0300 3034626

**Website:** <https://sarchelp.co.uk/get-help/>

If you have concerns but the person hasn't disclosed or denies any abuse but there are clear/concerning signs or you are not sure what to do, contact Safer Futures for advice.

For further information on local and national support services please see <https://safercornwall.co.uk/what-we-do/dasv-hub/covid-19-advice-and-information/>