

Domestic Abuse Awareness Toolkit

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Understanding Domestic Abuse

In the UK, it is estimated that there are around 2 million people a year affected by domestic abuse. With more than one in ten of all offences recorded by the police relating to some form of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse takes place at all levels of society regardless of gender, age, social class, race, religion, sexuality, or disability and the effects can be devastating. It can also occur between family members, or between carers and those they live with or care for in the home.

We all have an important part to play in recognising and destigmatising the issue of domestic abuse. This toolkit will help provide an overview of the types of abuse that can occur, signs to look out for and how to respond safely to someone who may be experiencing abuse.

Facts and Figures

Around **1 in 4 women** and **1 in 6 men** will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

The police recorded a total of **816,493** domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes in England and Wales in the year ending March 2025.

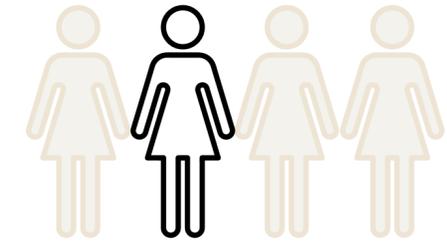
A domestic abuse related call is made to the police every **30 seconds**, yet it is estimated **less than 24%** of domestic abuse crime is reported. (Source: Refuge)

Domestic abuse leads to, on average, **1 woman** being killed by an abusive partner or ex **every 5 days** in England & Wales. (Source: Refuge)

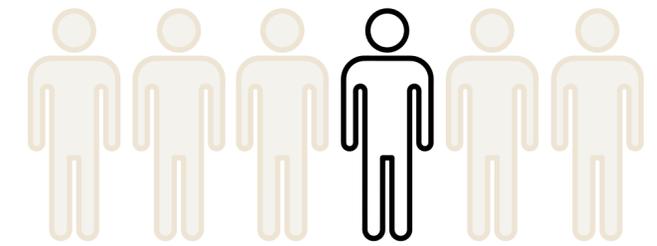
1 in 4 LGBTQ+ people will experience domestic violence, up to **80% of trans people**.

There is no specific typology of what a domestic abuse victim or a perpetrator of domestic abuse looks like.

The workplace can be a safe haven for some domestic abuse victims and therefore can be a key touchpoint to identify potential signs of abuse, it could provide someone an opportunity to disclose abuse and can be an avenue where appropriate support can be signposted.



Around **1 in 4 women** will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.



Around **1 in 6 men** will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

The Myths

Myth #1

Domestic abuse is a private matter, and I shouldn't get involved

Domestic abuse can have a devastating impact on victims, and perpetrators have taken advantage of the stigma that surrounds this issue. By talking about domestic abuse openly and the many forms that it comes in, can help to harvest a safe and open space for employees to disclose when they need support so they don't have to suffer in silence. Although it may feel difficult to talk about, conversations about domestic abuse should not be avoided.

Myth #2

You can tell if someone is experiencing domestic abuse because they will have bruises

Although physical abuse can occur, identifying the signs of abuse is not always as obvious as spotting physical injuries. A large proportion of domestic abuse is conducted through coercive and controlling behaviour, psychological, economic, emotional, and verbal abuse. Coercive and controlling behaviour can include being isolated from friends and family, threats, being pressured to work from home and having control over their personal devices.

Myth #3

Domestic abuse is not a workplace issue

All employers have a legal duty to take reasonable care for the health, safety, and wellbeing of their employees. Further on in this guidance you will see how abuse can directly affect an employee's behaviour at work including through their performance and attendance. In addition, it is a common occurrence that the workplace can be a person's only safe haven and opportunity to seek support and therefore it's crucial that you have the knowledge and tools to provide this for them.

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

In April 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act was signed into law by parliament to provide further protections to those who experience domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Bill includes a statutory definition, emphasising that domestic abuse is not just physical abuse:

“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.”³

Post-separation abuse, non-fatal strangulation, revenge porn and the threat of disclosing intimate images also became an offence with the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act.



Types of Domestic Abuse

Risk identification and evaluation

Abuse can take many different forms including:

- Psychological
- Emotional
- Economic
- Physical
- Verbal
- Sexual

As you can see, domestic abuse is not always physical. Coercive control can encompass any of the above and is an act or a pattern of acts used to harm, punish, or frighten the victim. Perpetrators use these types of behaviours to make their victim dependent on them by isolating them from any support, depriving them of their independence and limiting their freedom. The range of behaviours associated with this is wide and varied and whilst some of these can be more subtle they can still have a significant impact.

Other examples of coercive and controlling behaviours include:

- Being isolated from friends and family
- Taking control over everyday life e.g. what they can wear, what they can eat, who they can see, where they can go, when they can leave the house
- Being deprived of basic needs e.g. food
- Repeatedly being put down and made to feel worthless
- Accusations of infidelity
- Sending constant texts asking where they are, who they are with
- Making threats against them to hurt or kill
- Making threats to harm their children
- Demonstrations of violence e.g., Punching walls, hurting pets or threatening violence against strangers
- Restricting or depriving access to support services e.g. stopping them from going to see their GP
- Putting pressure on them to work from home or report in sick
- Controlling finances, e.g., taking wages and allowing a punitive allowance, requiring them to account for everything they spend
- Threats of self-harm, including suicide, if they ever left or reported them
- Limiting the ability of the other person to work or access transportation
- Monitoring the other person's social media profiles, sharing photos or videos without their consent, or using GPS locators to track their whereabouts
- Pressuring someone to have sex when they don't want to
- Demanding the other person comply with whims, needs, desires, and demands
- Blaming the other person for their discomfort with the world, themselves, their insecurities, or their anger
- Creating an unpredictable environment where no one knows what response to expect
- Stalking
- Cyber harassment
- For the LGBTQ+ community, abuse may include threatening to "out" someone, using looks, gestures, and language to reinforce homophobic, biphobic or transphobic control and withholding medication from transgender people

Each of these behaviours by themselves can be harmful. However, when they are combined, especially with the presence or threat of physical violence, they can have a devastating effect on the day-to-day lives of individuals.

Economic Abuse

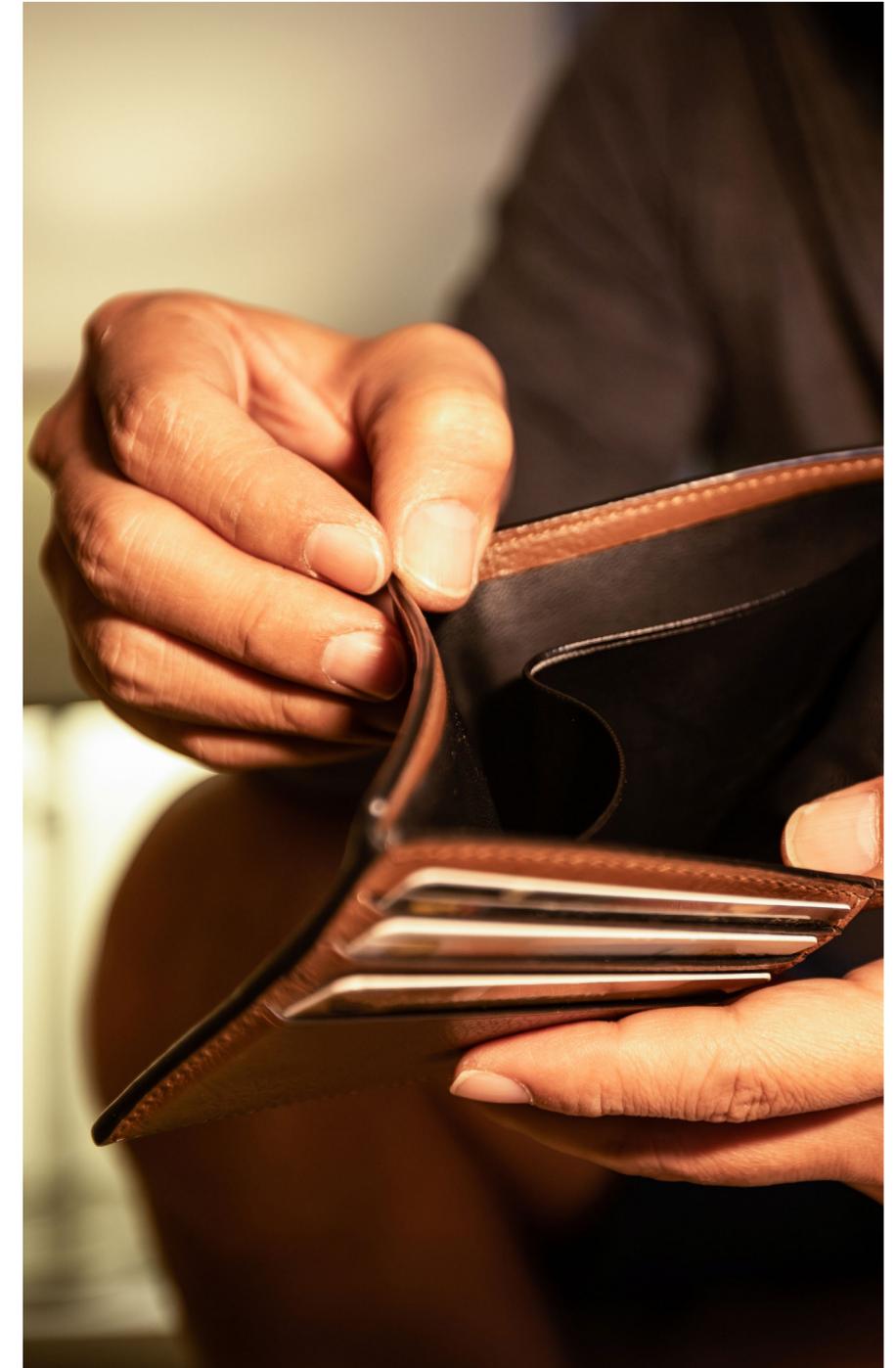
Economic abuse is a legally recognised form of domestic abuse and is defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. 1 in 5 people in the UK have experienced economic abuse by a current or former partner.

This can include control of finances, often used to prevent someone from having the money to pay for transport to get to work, or to buy suitable clothing for work. Taking away someone's financial independence can make it very difficult for them to leave a violent or abusive relationship.

Although controlling finances is common for someone experiencing economic abuse, it can also include controlling other resources such as food, clothing, transportation, and a place to live.

Other examples of economic abuse include, but are not limited to:

- Controlling when and how money is spent
- Making the other person justify every purchase made
- Controlling the use of the other person's mobile phone or car
- Insisting all bills, credit cards and loans are in the other person's name
- Building up debt in the other person's name without their knowledge

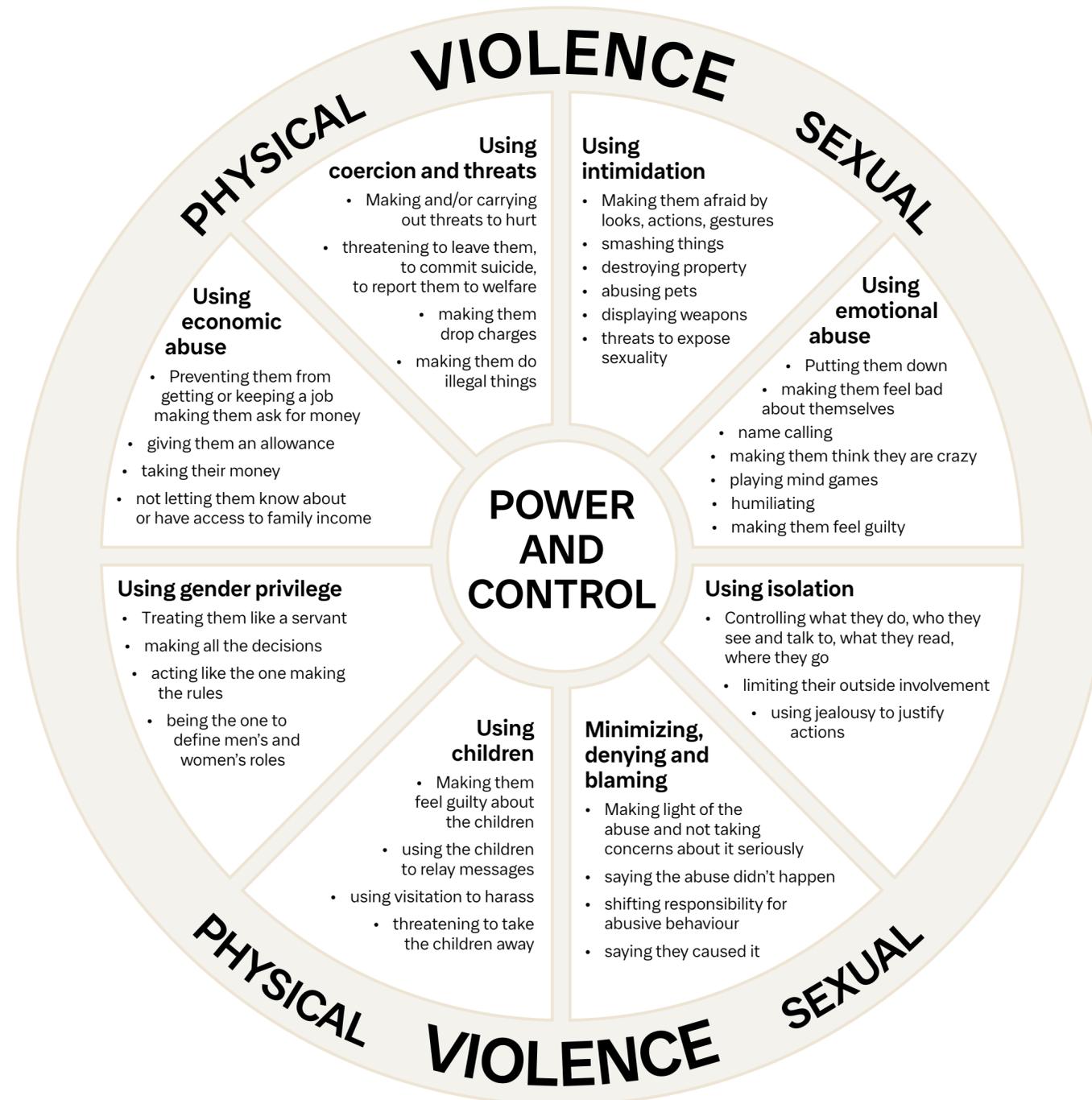


Power and Control Wheel

The power and control wheel below was developed in discussion with a large number of women survivors of domestic violence. It is a tool that helps to demonstrate the different ways an abusive partner can use power and control to manipulate a relationship and is used within the health and social care setting to help victims recognise any warning signs of their own relationship.

It is important to note that the behaviours outlined within the wheel are not only reinforced by the actual use of physical and sexual violence, but the continued threat of such violence. The level of abuse used by the perpetrator is likely to escalate if the victim challenges the control that they are exerting. This means that a domestic abuse victim may be most at risk if they decide to leave.

Source: Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota



Spotting the signs

As domestic abuse often includes the use of controlling and coercive behaviours it can make it more difficult to spot.

There may be multiple small things you notice.

Therefore, it's crucial that you familiarise yourself with some of the common signs to look out for.



Signs of abuse can include a change in someone's behaviour such as:

- Becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, or depressed
- Becoming distant and withdrawn when they are usually outspoken
- Struggling to concentrate
- Unexplained injuries such as bruises/ burns or they may use excuses for frequent injuries
- Becoming withdrawn and may stop attending social events
- Change in the manner they dress
- Change in the pattern or amount of make-up used
- Having a strong reaction to personal calls, texts or e-mails which may be from the perpetrator
- Obsession with time
- Fatigue/sleep disorders
- Reluctance to turn off mobile phone

For an employer, other signs could include:

- A sudden drop in performance e.g., someone who is usually punctual and organised starts to deliver work late or of poor quality
- Persistent lateness with little or no explanation (it may be useful to make a note of any occasions of lateness to identify any pattern or deterioration)
- Unexplained absences - Absences may be used to cover up any physical injuries or because they are being prevented from attending work. It's important for "return to work" meetings to be conducted as soon as possible after every absence and for you to look out for unexplained time off where the employee seems to act suspiciously or out of character
- May show a reluctance to work from home

How to respond safely to someone in an employee needs led way

If you're in a private location and have concerns that someone is experiencing abuse, but they have not yet disclosed this, you could ask indirect and non-threatening questions such as:

- "How are you feeling?"
- "How are things at home?"
- "I'm worried about you because... would you like to talk about it?"
- "I'm concerned about your safety..."

If they don't disclose anything at that stage, make sure they know they can speak to you whenever they need to, without judgement.

If someone does disclose that they are experiencing abuse keep the below in mind:

- Give them time, but don't push
- Repeat back if you are not sure about something - don't assume
- Ask them what do they need right now
- Empower them by offering information that will increase their choices
- Encourage them to take small steps, which will promote independence and build self-confidence
- Respect their reasons for staying - they will be the best judge of their own risk. Leaving an abusive relationship can seem overwhelming. Victim of abuse often leave several times before finally deciding to end the relationship. There are many complicated reasons why it is difficult to leave an abusive partner

Don't

- Ask for proof. It can be extremely difficult to disclose domestic violence, their experience must be believed
- Discuss or question anything associated with the abuse in front of others
- Assume they know what support is available
- Don't overload them with information about services
- Ever ask why they stay (this insinuates they are at fault)
- Impose your own values
- Try to rescue

Let them know they are believed:

- They have the right to feel the way they do - and they have the right to talk about it
- They are not to blame for the violence and are not responsible for the abuser's behaviour
- They have the right to report the abuser to the police to which the police have a duty to respond (but do not pressure them to take any action that they are not comfortable with)
- They are not alone and do not have to deal with what is happening alone - there is help available via the workplace, as well as specialist organisations who are well experienced in supporting domestic abuse survivors

How you can support someone as an employer

Any support provided to the employee should be agreed with them. Remember it's important to let them know how we can support them and what their options are, but it's up to them to let you know what they need.

Types of support could include:

- Signposting appropriate resources (there is a list at the end of this document)
- Offering paid leave to allow them time to get legal advice, seek refuge, make financial arrangements, escape their situation etc.
- Providing details to your Employee Assistance Programme if you offer this
- Allowing the employee to change their working pattern if required
- Providing a letter requesting they need to work in the office if this is what they want to do
- Moving the employee out of public view if they are in an outwardly facing role. e.g., if they usually work on reception is there a backoffice role they could do?
- Exploring the possibility of relocation if required
- Agreeing how to maintain contact with the employee e.g., it may not be safe to maintain contact via phone if their abuser monitors this
- Recording any threatening or violent incidents by the perpetrator in the workplace including visits, abusive/persistent phone calls, e-mails and other forms of harassment which can be used by the police or if the employee wants to seek a court order
- Allowing the employee to use an assumed name at work
- Escorting employees to and from their cars or public transport
- Issuing the employee with a mobile phone that is pre-programmed with emergency response numbers

Working from home

It's important to remember that whilst working from home you will not know whether your employee has someone looking over their shoulder, monitoring their screen or whether a perpetrator is accessing the work laptop themselves, so be mindful what you include in e-mails to the employee regarding any disclosures that they have made.

Even on video calls, there may be someone else present in the room that can't be seen on camera so it's always better to try and arrange a face-to-face meeting, if possible in a private and confidential space, if you have any concerns in relation to domestic abuse that you want to discuss with your employee.



Responding to perpetrators to stop abuse

You may well have employees within your business that are perpetrators of domestic abuse. Most perpetrators will have little or no contact with the police, the courts or have a referral to a perpetrators programme. It is more likely that they will reveal information about their violence and abuse to people they know and this could be within the workplace.

“Engaging with perpetrators of abuse in a positive, respectful way does not mean excusing the abuse and can help to increase safety and save lives.”

The Charity, Respect are a pioneering domestic abuse organisation developing safe, effective work with perpetrators, male victims and young people who use violence.

Their phonenumber offers confidential support to domestic abuse perpetrators via phone and webchat. They also offer resources such as self-help guides on their websites and can signpost to specialist domestic abuse prevention programmes. These specialist domestic abuse prevention programmes can aid a change in attitude and behaviours and ultimately keep more victims safe from abuse.

Perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse are often reluctant to acknowledge what they are doing and to ask for help. As an employer you can put up posters and share digitally information about provisions for support, such as the Respect phonenumber to show perpetrators how they can end their abusive behaviour.

If someone does disclose concerns about their own behaviours, it's important that they are held accountable in a consistent way. It's worth bearing in mind the following:

- Ensure they are aware that, as a business, you do not condone their behaviour and any forms of domestic abuse are unacceptable
- Make them aware that domestic abuse includes a wide range of controlling behaviours, not just physical abuse - provide them a copy of your own guidance/policy around this
- Let the person know that you may need to speak to the police or other agencies, particularly if there is a protection order in place



- Inform the perpetrator of the harm their abuse can have on victims and children regardless of if they witness it or not
- If the violence appears to be persistent and serious, you should not hesitate to call the police as this may require close monitoring
- You should also refer to your own code of conduct and HR policies with regards to how you would treat violent behaviour and/or criminal activity

What actions can I take today?

- Join the Employer's Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA) - this is a network which supports small and large businesses in tackling domestic abuse and it is free to join
- Look at implementing a Domestic Abuse policy within your workplace - EIDA provide a free template for you to use. A copy of the Intact Insurance UK Limited Domestic Abuse Policy can be found within this toolkit
- Download the "Bright Sky" app - this is a covert app which can be disguised as a weather app on your phone. It provides practical support and information on how to respond to domestic abuse as well as information on local services when you input your postcode
- Consider training up Domestic Abuse Awareness Champions within your business
- Familiarise yourself with local domestic abuse services to you and build links relationships with them
- Volunteer or fundraise for a charity that specialises in providing support to domestic abuse survivors
- If the violence appears to be persistent and serious, you should not hesitate to call the police as this may require close monitoring
- You should also refer to your own code of conduct and HR policies with regards to how you would treat violent behaviour and/or criminal activity

External support

- **Women's Aid** or Refuge for women
- **Men's Advice Line** for men
- **Galop** for the LGBTQ+ community
- **Nour** support for minority Muslim communities.
- **Karma Nirvana** supporting victims of honour-based abuse
- **Stay Safe East** tackling violence and abuse against disabled and deaf people
- **Southall Black Sisters** to meet the needs of black (Asian and African-Caribbean) women
- **Jewish Women's Aid** provides refuge and/or support to Jewish women and their children
- **Iranian & Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation** supports victims of honour based violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and domestic violence
- **Respect Phoneline** is a confidential helpline for domestic abuse perpetrators to support them in how to stop displaying abusive behaviours
- **Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse, Domestic Abuse Education, and WeThrive.**
- **Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA)**, a free to join network, supporting businesses in taking effective action on domestic abuse.
- **Domestic Abuse Education** educate businesses on domestic abuse, supporting them on their journey towards awareness and action.
- **WeThrive** recruit talent, empower survivors and equip organisations to address the business risk of domestic abuse perpetration.

