

Herefordshire Community Network

Support for Ukraine – information for guests

What is domestic abuse?



Domestic abuse as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in most cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. It is very common. In most cases, it is

experienced by women and is perpetrated by men. Domestic abuse against men is also possible and can take the form of physical violence, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse. Whatever your circumstances, though, you can find help and break free from an abusive relationship.

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse

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What is coercive control?

Domestic abuse isn't always physical. Coercive control is an act of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

Coercive and controlling behaviour is at the heart of domestic abuse.

This controlling behaviour is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive control creates invisible chains and a sense of fear that pervades all elements of a survivor's life. It works to limit their human rights by depriving them of their liberty and reducing their ability for action.

How do you know if this is happening to you?

Some common examples of coercive behaviour are:

- Isolating you from friends and family
- Depriving you of basic needs, such as food
- Monitoring your time
- Monitoring you via online communication tools or spyware
- Taking control over aspects of your everyday life, such as where you can go, who you can see, what you can wear and when you can sleep
- Depriving you access to support services, such as medical services
- Repeatedly putting you down, such as saying you're worthless
- Humiliating
- Controlling your finances
- Making threats or intimidating you

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Physical abuse is one of the first forms of domestic abuse that people recognise because it's the most visible. It is often a way for a perpetrator to gain control. It is illegal.

Some examples of physical abuse are:

- Punching, slapping, hitting, pinching, kicking, scratching or biting
- Applying pressure to your neck or holding you down, strangling or choking you
- Pulling your hair out
- Spitting at you or near you
- Using objects as weapons to attack or hurt you
- Punching walls or breaking things

Call 999 from a mobile. If you don't speak or answer questions, press 55 or tap when prompted and your call will be transferred to the police. The police will usually be able to find your location. If you don't press 55 or respond, your call could be ended.

Psychological and emotional abuse can be difficult to describe or identify. It's when a perpetrator uses words and non-physical actions to manipulate, hurt, scare or upset you.

Some examples of emotional and verbal abuse are:

- Screaming and shouting at you
- Mocking you, calling you hurtful names or using derogatory words about you
- Sulking or refusing to talk or be kind until you do something they want

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- Making you doubt your own sanity. This is known as gaslighting. A perpetrator may gaslight you into thinking that you are remembering things wrong or that you are misinterpreting things, later making you believe their version of events is true. This behaviour is often used to manipulate.
- Threatening that they will destroy something, hurt you or commit suicide
- Threatening to report you to the police, social services or a mental health team if you don't do what they say
- Telling you that they're sorry, that it isn't abuse
- Telling you that you deserve or cause the abuse
- Threatening to kill or harm you and/or your children

Financial abuse is part of coercive control, it involves a pattern of controlling, threatening and degrading behaviours relating to money and finances. The perpetrator uses money to control their partner's freedom. This can include using credit or debit cards without permission or building up debts in their partner's name. Economic abuse is a broader term, as it also includes restricting access to essential resources and services, such as food, clothing or transport, and refusing to allow someone to improve their economic status through employment, education or training. Some examples of economic abuse are:

- Controlling all the household income and keeping financial information a secret
- Taking out debts in your name, sometimes without you knowing
- Stopping you from being in work, education or training
- Making you do a certain number of hours at work, not contributing to any bills
- Having control over spending, checking receipts, having everything in their name

If you are experiencing financial abuse, [Surviving Economic Abuse](#) can support you.

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Sexual abuse and violence can take place within relationships or between family members and can often be a part of domestic abuse. If you consent to something because you are afraid or you have been pressured into it, it is not consent. Some examples of sexual abuse are:

- Rape or sexual assault. This can be any sexual act you did not consent to. It can include forced kissing, touching or penetration. If you have experienced this recently, find advice on getting treatment and support here.
- Having sex with you when you are unable to consent, for example if you are under the influence of drugs or alcohol which may affect your ability to consent.
- Using force, threats, guilt, manipulation or intimidation to make you perform sexual acts.
- Forcing you to have sex with other people or to become a sex worker.
- Forcing you to have sex or watch pornography in front of children.
- Degrading you during sex, such as calling you names, spitting, biting, punching or hurting you.

If you are experiencing sexual abuse, Rape Crisis can support you. In an emergency, always call 999.

If you have a disability or chronic health condition, an abuser may use this as part of the abuse. However, abuse is never your fault. Only the abuser is responsible for their actions. Domestic abuse can happen in any relationship, including those in which someone is a caregiver or assists you with something personal or intimate. If someone takes advantage of the power they have as a caregiver, this could be abuse.

Some of the ways disabled women experience abuse can include:

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- Withholding, hiding, destroying or manipulating medical equipment and/or tools, such as a walking stick, cane, hearing aid or wheelchair
- Refusing to help with attending important meetings, such as hospital appointments or benefit assessments
- Refusing to interpret what people are saying around you, for example if you are Deaf and use sign language
- Theft of state benefits or any other financial income
- Sexual touching while assisting you with personal care, such as dressing or bathing
- Demanding sex in exchange for caregiving
- Forced marriage or repeated sexual violence against women who cannot consent due to disability
- Prevention of access to medication or pain relief
- Overmedicating or under medicating, or changing a medication without telling you
- Doing things to exacerbate or take advantage of a disability or health condition, such as smoking indoors, leaving unreachable windows open in winter, or refusing to allow you to go to the toilet
- Refusing to assist you with caregiving responsibilities, including providing adequate meals and nutrition, dressing, bathing, access to transport and cleaning duties
- Isolating you from friends, family, support workers and support groups
- Saying that you are ugly or useless because of your disability, or calling you stupid because you don't understand

What is stalking and harassment?



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Harassment is when someone repeatedly behaves in a way that makes you feel scared, distressed or threatened.

There are different types of stalking and harassment, and anyone can be a victim.

Harassment

Someone you know could be harassing you, like a neighbour, or people from your local area or it could be a stranger.

Harassment may include:

- bullying at school or in the workplace
- cyber stalking (using the internet to harass someone)
- antisocial behaviour
- sending abusive text messages
- sending unwanted gifts
- unwanted phone calls, letters, emails or visits

It's harassment if the unwanted behaviour has happened more than once.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is unlawful, as a form of discrimination.

It is sexual harassment if the unwanted behaviour:

- violates your dignity
- creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment (this includes the digital environment, online)

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Some examples of sexual harassment would include:

- sexual comments, jokes or gestures
- staring or leering at your body
- using names like 'slut' or 'whore'
- unwanted sexual communications, like emails, texts
- sharing sexual photos or videos
- groping and touching
- pressuring you to do sexual things or offering you something in exchange for sex

What is stalking

Stalking is like harassment, but it's more aggressive. The stalker is obsessed with the person they're targeting. Someone you know could be stalking you; an ex-partner or a person you were friends with, or it might be a stranger. If it's someone you know, or knew, it doesn't mean that it's your fault; it's still stalking and it's an offence.

Stalking may include:

- regularly following someone
- repeatedly going uninvited to their home
- checking someone's internet use, email or other electronic communication
- hanging around somewhere they know the person often visits
- watching or spying on someone

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- identity theft (signing-up to services, buying things in someone's name)

It's stalking if the unwanted behaviour has happened more than once.

Online and digital abuse

Many relationships that begin romantically can quickly become controlling, with partners reading emails, checking texts and locations of social media posts. Research conducted by Refuge in 2021 found that 1 in 3 women in the UK have experienced online abuse (perpetrated on social media or other online platform) at some point in their lives.

Online platforms are increasingly used to perpetrate domestic abuse

Online abuse can happen over long periods and escalates over time. It can include behaviours such as monitoring of social media profiles or emails, abuse over social media such as Facebook or Twitter, sharing intimate photos or videos without your consent, using GPS locators or spyware.

Where can I find help?

- [Live chat](#)
- [Survivor's forum](#)
- [Support by email](#)
- [Domestic Violence Helplines](#)
- [Children and young people](#)
- [National Domestic Abuse Helpline \(Herefordshire\)](#)
- [National LGBT Domestic Violence Helpline \(Herefordshire\)](#)
- [Sign Health Deaf Domestic Abuse Service \(Herefordshire\)](#)
- [Stonewater - Herefordshire Refuge \(Herefordshire\)](#)
- [The No Woman Turned Away Project \(Herefordshire\)](#)



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- [The Salvation Army Modern Slavery Adult Victim Care Service \(Herefordshire\)](#)
- [Unseen's Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline \(Herefordshire\)](#)
- [West Mercia Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centre \(Herefordshire\)](#)
- [West Mercia Women's Aid - Herefordshire \(Herefordshire\)](#)
- [Herefordshire men's victim service](#)
- [Women's Aid Live Chat \(Herefordshire\)](#)
- [Women's Aid Survivors' Forum \(Herefordshire\)](#)

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