

# **Domestic Violence** Assessment Guide for Healthcare Professionals

# What is Domestic Violence?

**Domestic Violence is defined as; any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.**

This definition incorporates issues such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so called 'honour' killings, as well as elder abuse when committed within a family or by an intimate partner.

Without intervention, the violence usually escalates in both frequency and severity resulting in repeat visits to the healthcare system.

1 in 4 women and between 1 in 6 & 1 in 7 men experience domestic violence or abuse from a partner, ex-partner or family member in their lifetime. Domestic violence is often encountered by health and social care professionals, whether in their own lives or in the lives of patients they meet.

**For example:** Research has found that general practice is the one public service where perpetrators voluntarily disclosed domestic abuse. Hence, it is essential that primary care professionals know how to ask about domestic violence and where to signpost both perpetrators and victims to get help.



# Assess all Patients for Domestic Violence

- Talk to the patient **alone in a safe, private environment**.
- **Ask simple, direct questions** such as:
  - Because violence is so common in many people's lives, I've begun to ask all my patients about it routinely.
  - Are you in a relationship with a person who physically hurts or threatens you?
  - Did someone cause these injuries? Who?

**The best way to find out about domestic violence is to ask directly. However, be aware of:**

- **History suggesting domestic violence:**
  - traumatic injury or sexual assault;
  - suicide attempt, overdose;
  - physical symptoms related to stress;
  - vague complaints;
  - problems or injuries during pregnancy;
  - history inconsistent with injury;
  - delay in seeking care or repeat visits.
- **Behavioural clues:** evasive, reluctance to speak in front of partner; overly protective or controlling partner.
- **Physical clues:** any physical injuries; unexplained multiple or old injuries.

# Take a Domestic Violence History

- Past history of domestic violence, sexual assault.
- History of abuse to any children.
- Injuries at different stages of healing.

**Send Important Messages to Patient**  
(**avoid victim blaming**):

- You are not alone.
- You are not to blame.
- There is help available.
- You do not deserve to be treated this way.

**Assess Safety:**

- Are you afraid to go home?
- Have there been threats of homicide or suicide?
- Are there weapons present?
- Can you stay with family or friends?
- Do you need access to a refuge?
- Do you want police intervention?

### Make Referrals:

- Refer individual to **Domestic Violence Advocacy Service** or **Eaves**
- Provide list of **refuges, resources, and helpline numbers**
- National Domestic Violence Helpline: **0808 200 0247** or e-mail: [info@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:info@womensaid.org.uk)
- **Schedule follow-up appointment**

### Document Findings:

- **Use the patient's own words regarding injury and abuse**
- **Legibly document all injuries;** use a body map if possible
- **Take instant or digital photographs** (with time and date) of injuries if possible

### Information Sharing:

- **Ensure that records are held securely**
- **Do not disclose details to the perpetrator**
- **Never attempt to mediate between the victim and perpetrator**

## Immediate Help in Barking and Dagenham

### Domestic Violence Advocacy Service

07971 114 232  
020 8217 7746  
929 8227 2133

Offers short-term practical advice and information as well as panic alarms, legal advice and signposting to accommodation.

### Eaves Women's Aid Barking and Dagenham (EWA)

0800 980 1993

Specialist service specifically for women and children who have experienced domestic abuse providing refuge and children support.

### Threshold Support

020 8743 2165

Housing support for gay men experiencing domestic violence and homophobic crime.

### Broken Rainbows

020 8743 2165

Help for LGB and T.

### Barking and Dagenham Domestic Violence Forum

[www.bbdivf.co.uk](http://www.bbdivf.co.uk)

Help for Perpetrators

### Respect

0845 122 8609

Helpline for people who commit domestic violence. Respect also provides programmes for people who are willing to change their behaviour.

### Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP)

020 8563 7983

Project providing services for violent men who want to change their behaviour.

### Everyman Project

020 7263 8884

Tuesdays and Wednesday 1830 to 2100. Counselling service run by men for men, and aims to educate men to stop being violent.

## **Background**

This document was developed based on a national resource from the Family Violence Prevention Fund ([www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)) which was endorsed by a wide range of national medical organisations and professional representative bodies.

*Produced - February 2008*