

Domestic abuse - Guidance overview

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

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This authorised professional practice (APP) on domestic abuse has been developed through the consolidation and updating of pre-existing Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) (2008) Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse, and professional expertise of police and voluntary sector practitioners. The section on risk assessment and risk factors draws on findings from systematic reviews of research evidence. Where the guidance draws on any empirical evidence it is explicitly referenced in the text.

The APP responds to a number of developments in the field of domestic abuse.

The **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** statutory definition of domestic abuse is set out below:

- The behaviour of a person (A) towards another person (B) is 'domestic abuse' if—
 - (a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
 - (b) the behaviour is abusive.
- 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 (see subsection (4));
 - (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse;
- and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.
- 'Economic abuse' means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to—
 - (a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or
 - (b) obtain goods or services.
- For the purposes of this Act A's behaviour may be behaviour 'towards' B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B's child).

Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 provides for the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour, where the perpetrator and the victim are personally connected.

Prior to 5 April 2023, 'personally connected' was limited to:

- a suspect and victim in an intimate relationship
- cohabitation combined with either (i) a past intimate relationship or (ii) membership of the same family

Amendments to the Section 76 under the Serious Crime Act 2015 removed the cohabitation requirement. From 5 April 2023 the perpetrator and victim do not need to be living together.

The Victims' Commissioner meets regularly with government, criminal justice and support agency officials to highlight what works well and to advocate for change where the system needs improving. The Victims' Commissioner works to:

- raise awareness of common issues faced by victims and witnesses
- monitor how criminal justice and victim support agencies comply with the **Victims' Code** and **Witness Charter**
- conduct detailed research and produce comprehensive reviews
- use their independent voice to influence national policy-making and hold partner agencies to account
- speak up about what works best for all victims and witnesses, especially the most vulnerable

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 established in law the Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. Its role is to provide public leadership on domestic abuse issues, oversee and monitor the provision of domestic abuse services in England and Wales. More information can be found in the **Domestic Abuse Commissioner factsheet (Home Office, 2024)**.

Related resources:

- **Victims' Commissioner's strategic plan**
- **Domestic Abuse Commissioner's strategic plan 2022-2025**
- **College of Policing: Principles for the identification, assessment and management of serial or potentially dangerous domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators.**

Tags

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