

Advice note for first responders

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

First published 12 August 2025

The purpose of this advice note is to provide advice for first responders attending a report where 'honour'-based abuse (HBA) has been identified as a concern. First responders can include:

- call handlers
- response officers
- patrol officers
- neighbourhood policing officers
- police community support officers
- special constables

First responders should read this advice note in conjunction with the [**HBA background advice note**](#). This contains important information relating to culture, risk factors, communication and victim considerations.

For further information on HBA investigations, go to the [**HBA advice note for investigators**](#).

First response

When responding to an HBA investigation, the severity of the situation and the immediacy of risk to the victim should not be ignored. The priority at all times is to safeguard and protect victims.

When speaking to the victim for the first time, first responders should remember:

- this may be the only opportunity to safeguard the victim – the [**one chance rule**](#)
- to listen and reassure the victim(s) they will be taken seriously regardless of whether a crime is reported or whether they are supportive of a criminal investigation or not
- to ask if there is any feeling of dishonour, family shame or embarrassment for which the victim is being blamed, held responsible or being made to do something they don't want to do, such as a forced marriage
- to identify behaviours and risks that are affecting the victim
- to not make assumptions based on misconceptions about culture, heritage or religion

- to not be afraid to ask the victim questions to clarify understanding about what has been disclosed. Go to [**HBA background advice note**](#) and [**Annex A – Definitions**](#)
- to conduct appropriate checks on local, national and international databases about the suspect, victim and location
- to be aware of any possible manipulation by suspects or the wider community to disclose information about the victim(s)
- to make enquiries about any other possible subjects such as siblings, friends, a boyfriend, a girlfriend or partners who could be at risk and in need of safeguarding or if anyone has information that could be of assistance
- to keep all information confidential and not share it without [**consent**](#) from the victim. The victim is likely to be at greater risk if information is shared with family or community members
- that the victim may be reluctant to engage for fear of:
 - criminalising and bringing shame to their family and community
 - repercussions if family members become aware of their report to the police
- the victim may be unwilling to disclose the abuse and may be fearful or hostile, as a result of the trauma or control they have experienced (go to [**ongoing support**](#))
- to speak to them alone, away from other family or local community members (find out more in [**collusion**](#))
- to not leave the victim alone with potential suspects
- to not attempt mediation with family or community members
- to not use family, including children, family, community members or local interpreters to translate what the victim is saying (find out more in [**collusion**](#))
- to use an accredited language line or a registered interpreter from outside the local area and check there are no concerns about the interpreter from the victim
- to use professional curiosity to establish the wider context of any previous offending behaviour
- to secure evidence and consider the use of [**body-worn video**](#)
- to request the victim's permission to take voluntary DNA samples/photographs/fingerprints (find out more in [**victim care, support and safeguarding**](#))
- to thoroughly record initial accounts (go to [**achieving best evidence in criminal proceedings with children and special measures**](#))
- to identify potential suspects and establish the motivation for their behaviour to enable lines of enquiry and assist [**arrest**](#) strategies

- where it is appropriate, to offer to retain the victim's passport in a safe place to avoid being taken abroad
- to consider whether this is a **critical incident** and respond accordingly

Next steps

If HBA is suspected and it is believed individuals could be at risk, first responders should:

- contact force specialists or escalate the case to their line manager for immediate advice and to discuss **arrest** strategies for the suspect(s), however, immediate action should be taken to safeguard the victim and apprehend the suspect(s) when a delay might put the victim in danger
- continue to build on intelligence and information about the suspect, victim and location
- record crime report and intelligence
- establish a safe method of contact with the victim – this could include agreeing a 'safe' word or phrase to indicate it is safe to speak to them
- conduct an effective risk assessment
- develop a safeguarding plan and record it on the crime report
- respond to any risk and actions required to safeguard the victim from further risk. This could include:
 - using police protection powers for children under **section 46 of the Children Act 1989** to remove the victim to safe accommodation
 - statutory requirements to notify child or adult social care
 - referrals to specialist **support services**
 - **protection orders**
- consult the **multi-agency practice guidelines on handling cases of forced marriage** if it is suspected that a person is being/has been forced into a marriage

You can find out more in:

- **Vulnerability-related risk guidelines**
- **Public Protection Tactical Menu of Options** (you will need to log in to College Learn)

Tags

Forced marriage and honour based abuse Victim care