

# Initial contact

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Call handlers and front counter staff play a crucial role in the early stages of a domestic abuse response. All police officers and staff must ensure the immediate safety of the victim, children, other members of the public and responding officers. A domestic abuse call may take longer to handle than other reports, and quality of response should take precedence over speed.

Victims may present in different ways, from appearing highly distressed to being very calm. Neither should be used to gauge the seriousness of the situation. Police officers and staff should adopt a reassuring, professional approach and should avoid making assumptions based on demeanour.

Front counter staff should act quickly when someone attends a police station to disclose abuse. Victims should be taken out of public view at the earliest opportunity to protect their safety and confidentiality.

For further information, go to:

- [Call handler quick reference guide: Domestic abuse](#)
- [Checklist: Key considerations for front counter staff taking a report of domestic abuse](#)

## Receiving a report

Police should treat every report of domestic abuse as the start of an investigation. Officers and staff should:

- establish as much detail as possible when taking an initial report
- ask questions to identify behaviours or offences, as victims or witnesses may not describe behaviour as domestic abuse
- record incidents that form part of a wider pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour, harassment or stalking, even where no single threshold is met

Forces should ensure that processes are in place to transfer incidents correctly from command-and-control systems onto crime and incident recording systems. Supervisors should review reports

to ensure accuracy and compliance with the counting rules.

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Information gathering](#)
- [Information management](#)

## Referrals from other agencies

Police may receive domestic abuse information through referrals from other agencies or multi-agency arrangements, such as [Multi-agency risk assessment conferences for domestic abuse \(MARAC\)](#). Where a referral indicates that a crime has been committed, officers should record and investigate it in line with [National Crime Recording Standard \(NCRS\)](#) requirements.

For further information, go to:

- [APP on information management](#)

## Third-party reports and counter allegations

Police officers and staff should look beyond the initial behaviour complained of and consider the possibility of abuse. Third-party callers may misinterpret what they see or downplay the seriousness.

Perpetrators sometimes make calls themselves to create [counter-allegations](#) or to minimise their own role. Police officers and staff should be alert to this possibility and should record details carefully, noting demeanour, background noise and what was said.

Staff working in contact and dispatch centres should be [trained](#) to identify and grade domestic abuse incidents appropriately. Inappropriate logging of domestic-related incidents – for example, as a concern for safety, criminal damage or antisocial behaviour – can cause delay and place victims at risk. The training should emphasise that abuse is not only physical and should ensure that staff are familiar with more subtle forms of abuse, such as [controlling or coercive behaviour](#).

## Identifying information and intelligence about domestic abuse

Intelligence relating to domestic abuse should be identified, assessed and retained on appropriate local and national systems, in line with [APP on information management](#).

Police officers should use this intelligence to:

- identify risk factors associated with victims, children and suspects
- identify and target persistent offenders or to support repeat victims
- identify any links with other criminals and other criminal behaviour
- indicate potential further information on local and national computer systems
- make links with child abuse intelligence and other related investigations
- monitor the accuracy of domestic abuse intelligence data
- produce statistical information
- share information with partner agencies, where appropriate
- comply with the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme \(DVDS\)](#)

Domestic abuse intelligence should be disseminated to police personnel who need it.

Go to [domestic abuse and the intelligence process](#) for further discussion of the use of domestic abuse intelligence.

## Importance of history and context

Understanding the wider history of abuse is essential. A single report may not reflect the full pattern of harm. Police officers and staff should check force systems for:

- previous incidents and risk assessments
- court orders, bail conditions or civil injunctions
- [MARAC](#) involvement
- known markers or alerts

Forces should consider maintaining a running narrative on victims and perpetrators to avoid repeated questioning, reduce trauma and support more accurate risk assessment.

If a victim is working with an [independent domestic violence adviser \(IDVA\)](#) or other domestic abuse specialist, they are advised to call the police before a situation escalates to violence. Calling at an early stage does not mean the risks are lessened.

## Safety considerations

Protecting those at risk is the overriding principle. Staff should:

- keep victims informed of officer deployment
- provide safety or first aid advice where appropriate
- monitor call conditions if the victim is in an insecure environment, such as a public place, hotel or vehicle
- respond to codewords, silent calls and the activation of safety devices (for example, [TecSAFE phones](#), GPS tags or alarms)

If the suspect is present, staff should keep the caller on the line to capture audio evidence and provide updates to officers. If the suspect has left, victims should be advised on securing the premises and a description circulated to officers.

Where a child makes the report, staff must focus on immediate safety and reassurance, asking only essential questions until officers arrive.

## Information gathering

Police officers and staff should gather and record essential details, balancing the need for fast deployment with capturing accurate information.

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Information gathering](#)

When the call handler has established that the victim is safe, they should provide advice about [preserving the crime scene](#) until the police arrive.

## Deployment

Police officers and staff should prioritise reports of domestic abuse for an immediate response, unless specific risk indicators suggest otherwise. Making an appointment at the station is rarely appropriate. Officers and staff should:

- flag to the attending officer if the suspect is believed to have left the local area

- close all domestic abuse computer-aided dispatch (CAD) entries with a reference number, only after contact with the victim and completion of a risk assessment
- complete an incident report, unless reliable evidence refutes the original information

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Deployment](#)
- [Checklist: Details to be provided to the attending officer](#)

## Barriers to reporting domestic abuse

Officers should recognise that victims face significant barriers to reporting domestic abuse. Officers should assess and address factors that may prevent victims from reporting. This includes:

- building trust and [rapport](#)
- avoiding actions that may increase [risk](#) to the victim
- identifying victim needs (such as caring responsibilities, financial concerns or immigration status) and signposting to appropriate [agencies](#) and [support services](#)

Victims may fear losing custody of children and escalation of abuse, and may mistrust the police. They may also face direct threats from the perpetrator, including:

- further violence
- loss of their home
- exposure of private information

Officers and staff should also understand that domestic abuse may result in psychological harm, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or related conditions. These may cause victims to:

- distrust professionals
- avoid contact
- appear numb
- blame themselves
- experience intense fear or anger
- struggle to assess risk accurately

Officers should be alert to these responses and understand they are consistent with trauma rather than non-cooperation.

For more information on PTSD, go to [NHS Choices, post-traumatic stress disorder](#).

## Tags

APP Domestic abuse