

Associated investigations (Appendix A)

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This appendix provides further advice and guidance on crime types and investigations that may be associated with domestic abuse.

Officers should recognise that domestic abuse rarely occurs in isolation. It is often linked to other forms of harm, including:

- child abuse
- vulnerable adult abuse
- stalking or harassment
- sexual offences
- homicide
- unexpected death
- missing person cases

Domestic abuse may also be a factor in incidents that do not at first appear to be related.

Causing or allowing a child or vulnerable adult to die or suffer serious physical harm

Officers must be aware that [section 5 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 \(DVCVA\)](#) creates the offence of causing or allowing the death of a child or vulnerable adult.

[Section 1 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims \(Amendment\) Act 2012](#) extends this to cover serious physical harm, defined under [section 5\(6\) of the DVCVA](#) as harm amounting to grievous bodily harm.

A person aged 16 years or over who is a member of a household and has frequent contact with a child or vulnerable adult may be guilty of this offence if:

- they caused the death or serious harm

- they were, or ought to have been, aware that the victim was at significant risk of serious physical harm from another member of the household
- they failed to take reasonable steps to prevent harm
- the victim subsequently died or suffered serious physical harm from the unlawful act in circumstances that the defendant foresaw or ought to have foreseen

Officers should consider the following.

- What constitutes reasonable steps depends on the circumstances, including the person's role in the household and whether they are themselves a victim of domestic abuse.
- Evidence of a history of violence towards the victim or others in the household is likely to indicate a significant risk of serious harm.

For further information, go to:

- [APP on child abuse](#)

Child abuse

Children who witness domestic abuse are legally recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. They may experience direct physical, sexual or emotional abuse, or suffer harm from witnessing abuse within the household.

Under [section 31\(9\) of the Children Act 1986](#), harm includes impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another.

Where domestic abuse is present, officers must consider the welfare of any child in the household or who are otherwise affected by the incident. Children exposed to domestic abuse are at risk of both immediate and long-term harm. Officers should treat them as potential victims and should ensure that safeguarding actions are taken in line with the [Children Act 1989](#) and local safeguarding procedures.

Officers should seek advice from a supervisor or a domestic abuse or child protection specialist if required. Although taking a child into emergency care is a serious step with significant implications, leaving a child in a dangerous situation can have far more severe and lasting consequences.

For further information, go to:

- [Child abuse APP](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children](#)

Safeguarding

Officers attending domestic abuse incidents must:

- establish whether any children were present, witnessed the incident or ordinarily live at the address
- ensure that any child believed to be on the premises is seen and that their safety is confirmed
- record all relevant details, including the child's name, date of birth, address, school or nursery, and any immediate welfare concerns

If officers are told that children are present but cannot see them, they should make further enquiries and look for signs of their presence (for example, toys or clothing).

Investigative considerations

Exposure of a child to domestic abuse may constitute child neglect or cruelty under criminal law. Officers should consider this when assessing the need for arrest and charging decisions.

Where both parents may be involved, officers should seek supervisory advice on arrest sequencing to avoid leaving a child without care, unless immediate safeguarding concerns require both parents to be arrested.

If a child is a witness to the domestic abuse or a direct victim, officers must ensure that any interview is conducted in accordance with [Achieving best evidence in criminal proceedings](#). Officers should consider early involvement of a registered intermediary.

Record keeping

Officers should record details of all children present at, or ordinarily resident at, an address where a domestic abuse incident has occurred. This includes:

- full name (and any other known or previously used names)
- date of birth and sex
- address and living arrangements
- general practitioner

- school or nursery
- primary carer or care arrangements for looked-after children
- observations of the child's welfare, demeanour and injuries, as well as anything said by the child

Family annihilation

Family annihilation refers to cases where an individual kills members of their immediate family, typically their children and sometimes their current or former partner. Offenders are most frequently male and may take their own life following the incident.

Research suggests that some family annihilators have a history of **controlling or coercive behaviour**. Some, but not all, may also have a history of violence towards their partner. Events that may precede family annihilation include relationship break-up, childcare disputes and financial problems.

Officers should consider the potential risk of family annihilation when assessing cases involving:

- domestic abuse
- relationship separation
- threats of harm to children or partners

Indicators of coercive control, escalating risk or suicidal intent should trigger immediate safeguarding actions and multi-agency information sharing, in line with local protocols.

Homicide

Data from the **Office for National Statistics** indicates that, on average, around half of female homicide victims are killed by a partner or ex partner, compared to less than 10% of male homicides.

When investigating a domestic homicide, officers should use intelligence sources and specialist staff with expertise in domestic abuse investigations and coordination. Investigators should also seek information from partner agencies to establish any history of domestic abuse or related risk indicators.

Officers should consider whether there are links to:

- [child abuse](#) or sexual offences
- risks to previous or potential future victims (go to [domestic violence disclosure scheme](#))
- existing and future child contact arrangements and agreements

Domestic homicides that are committed by family members and are claimed to be attempts to 'restore honour' are sometimes referred to as honour killings. Officers should note that concepts of honour and other cultural beliefs are not a defence to homicide or assault.

For further information, go to:

- Domestic Homicide Project's [Domestic homicides and suspected victim suicides 2022 to 2023 report](#)
- [APP on forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse](#)

Incidents that are not overtly domestic abuse

Some offences or incidents may be linked to domestic abuse, even where this is not apparent at the time of reporting. Examples include:

- street disturbances and public disorder, such as breach of the peace
- antisocial behaviour
- neighbourhood disputes
- nuisance calls
- animal abuse or mistreatment
- criminal damage
- assaults
- unexpected deaths

Information about domestic abuse may also emerge during investigations into other offences when an individual is brought into custody.

Officers should consider whether an apparently unrelated offence or incident may be connected to domestic abuse. They should assess whether the offence could either:

- have been committed in connection with domestic abuse

- be the result of **controlling or coercive behaviour** (for example, acquisitive crime committed under the instruction of a controlling partner)

Where this is suspected:

- officers should record and investigate the domestic abuse element
- any identified risks should inform screening, assessment and safety planning
- appropriate support services should be offered to victims

If a person who appears to be an offender discloses that they are a victim of domestic abuse, officers should:

- treat and investigate that disclosure as they would for any other victim
- ensure that safeguarding measures and referrals are made as appropriate

Where a low-level offender is identified as a victim of domestic abuse, officers should consider diversion schemes in conjunction with support services.

Whatever the type of incident, it is essential that officers properly identify the domestic abuse element, including risk, and put the necessary processes and support services in place.

Missing persons

There is a potential link between missing persons and domestic abuse. The person reporting an individual as missing may not know about, or might not disclose, domestic abuse to the police. Identifying whether the missing person is a victim of domestic abuse, a victim of child abuse or an offender will influence the type and level of investigation. The missing person could be the victim of a domestic homicide. It is also possible that by reporting a person as missing, an abuser could be attempting to locate a victim who has escaped from a violent situation.

Additional considerations apply where a missing person is 16 or 17 years old, as they are still considered a child.

Domestic abuse officers should be informed when a domestic abuse victim, suspect or offender is reported missing. Officers should:

- use previous domestic abuse records and intelligence to inform the investigation

- liaise with domestic abuse service providers (such as local refuges or outreach services) where appropriate
- respect the confidentiality protocols of those services and not presume that information will be disclosed

For further information, go to:

- [APP on missing persons](#)

Missing person who is a domestic abuse victim

When investigating a missing person who is, or may be, a victim of domestic abuse, including forced marriage or so-called 'honour-based abuse' (HBA), officers should do the following.

- Prioritise safety and confidentiality. Confirm only whether the traced person is safe and well. Seek their consent before disclosing any further information to the person who reported them missing or to others.
- Consider that children may run away to escape abuse. The family may not disclose this. Review all available history for indicators of domestic, sexual or other abuse.
- Be alert to manipulation. Abusers may report victims missing to:
 - portray false concern and conceal abuse or homicide
 - obtain the victim's location or force their return
 - influence police perception of the situation
- Remember that, conversely, abusers may fail to report a victim missing to avoid scrutiny.
- Use the expertise of domestic abuse officers and their links with refuges and outreach services, ensuring that refuge locations are never disclosed.
- Carry out full domestic abuse checks, including:
 - Police National Computer (PNC) and Police National Database (PND)
 - civil injunctions or orders restricting contact
 - force intelligence and child protection systems
 - local authority information on children subject to child protection plans (England) or child protection registers (Wales)
 - Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR)

Investigations should include checks for a history of abuse, using police and partner agency sources, as well as relevant associates and relatives.

Missing person who is a domestic abuse suspect

In cases where the reported missing person is, or might be, a domestic abuse suspect or offender, officers should do the following:

- Recognise that victims may be too frightened or ashamed to disclose abuse. Where this is suspected, officers should consider offering the victim support through an appropriate partner agency.
- Assess any indication of suicidal behaviour. Threats or attempts at suicide should be treated seriously. Suicidal individuals should also be considered potentially homicidal, as they may pose a risk to victims, children or others. Domestic homicides frequently involve the perpetrator taking their own life (go to [Family annihilation](#)).
- Consider the presence of children and take immediate steps to safeguard any children involved.

Sex work

Victims of domestic abuse may be forced or coerced into sex work by partners, family members or others who exploit them for financial or sexual gain. The perpetrator may present as a partner, relative or 'manager', but their behaviour constitutes exploitation and abuse.

Officers should identify and act on any links between domestic abuse and sex work. Failure to recognise the domestic abuse may expose victims and any children to further harm or homicide.

Police operations or investigations involving sex work should, at the tasking and coordination stage, assess the potential for domestic abuse, coercive control or trafficking. Officers should ensure that appropriate safeguarding referrals and multi-agency coordination are in place.

Where a victim is aged 16 or 17 years, officers should also consider the likelihood of child sexual exploitation (CSE).

For further information, go to:

- [Sex work national police guidance](#)

Sexual offences

Sexual abuse may form part of domestic abuse but is often not disclosed when other forms of abuse are the primary reason for police involvement. Many victims find disclosure difficult, even at crisis point. Officers should recognise the potential for sexual offences within domestic abuse cases from the outset of an investigation.

Information from partner agencies, including voluntary sector and specialist support services, may indicate the presence of sexual abuse. Officers should identify and act on such indicators appropriately. Officers should also:

- consider sexual abuse at the earliest opportunity in every domestic abuse investigation
- ensure that victims are provided with specially trained officers who can sensitively explore potential sexual offending and enable disclosure
- provide victims with information about sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) or local equivalents, and explain the potential benefits of a forensic medical examination

Where sexual offences are disclosed during a domestic abuse investigation, even if not part of the original report, officers should:

- provide victims with information about relevant local services, such as [SARCs](#)
- ensure that information is recorded and shared with the force's intelligence capability
- record the offence as both domestic abuse and sexual abuse where appropriate
- ensure early deployment of a specially trained officer

Where a victim is 16 or 17 years old, officers should consider CSE as a factor.

Officers should apply the principles of Operation Soteria and the [national operating model](#) for responding to rape and serious sexual offences, by ensuring that investigations are:

- victim-centred by providing victims with the information they need, so they can make decisions
- suspect-focused by securing good quality evidence, to ensure that a full and thorough investigation can be done
- context-led by considering the situation, relationship of the suspect and victim, and desires of the victim.

A **national operating model** has been developed for responding to rape and serious sexual assault, which aims to:

- improve policing procedures
- increase charge rates
- support equity across justice processes and outcomes

For further information, go to:

- **APP on rape and sexual offences**
- **Briefing note: For police first responders to a report of rape or sexual assault**

Managing sexual offenders and violent offenders

Domestic abuse may also emerge in the management of sexual offenders and violent offenders.

Officers should consider the potential for domestic abuse when working with individuals managed under **multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPAs)** or as potentially dangerous persons (PDPs).

Evidence of domestic abuse may also arise during the management of offenders not previously linked to such behaviour. For example, it may arise during a home visit to a registered sex offender (RSO).

In all such cases:

- domestic abuse allegations should be investigated in accordance with this guidance
- information should be recorded and stored on police systems, including PND and ViSOR
- where appropriate, individuals should be included in force risk-management processes, such as MAPPA or PDP frameworks

Stalking or harassment

Domestic abuse investigations may involve stalking or harassment offences, including cyber and online stalking. These are common following separation, when victims may face increased risk, but can also occur within ongoing relationships, particularly where there is **controlling or coercive behaviour**.

For further information, go to:

- [Advice to police responders to ensure an effective response to stalking or harassment](#)
- [APP on stalking or harassment](#)
- [HBA violence against women and girls toolkit](#)

Unexpected death

Investigations into unexpected or unexplained deaths may reveal evidence of [controlling or coercive behaviour](#) or other forms of domestic abuse, as background to an apparent suicide. Research shows that the risk of intimate partner homicide or victim suicide increases where a [history of coercive controlling behaviour](#) is present.

Where possible, officers should conduct background checks at the scene for any domestic abuse crimes and non-crime incidents. Investigations into the longer-term history should also be done subsequently.

At the scene, officers should:

- record the details of all people present in the household at the time of the death
- record any known history of domestic abuse associated with the victim, the address or people who were present in the household at the time of the death
- contact close associates and others who may have information relevant to a history of domestic abuse, including family, friends and neighbours
- consider whether there are ongoing risks to other individuals in the household, particularly children and vulnerable adults, and take immediate safeguarding action

Officers should engage supervisors and, where appropriate, professional investigation officers (PIP) 2 investigators at an early stage. Where a suspected suicide involves a history of domestic abuse, officers should consider the need for further investigation and PIP 3 oversight.

Any relevant information uncovered about domestic abuse could be included in the 'circumstances of death' section in the death report to coroners.

Police officers should demonstrate professional curiosity beyond what may seem an obvious explanation of the circumstances. Research from [Domestic Homicide Reports](#) shows that the

suspect was present at over two-thirds of deaths involving a fall from height. In several cases, the suspect was the person who called emergency services and claimed that the victim fell or jumped. Police should consider this in all cases of unexpected deaths or suspected suicide, where the suspect may attempt to influence the police investigation.

Domestic abuse perpetrators may attempt to influence criminal justice and/or inquest processes following death, including by claiming to be the victim's 'next of kin'. Although the term does not hold a legal status, a domestic abuse perpetrator may request the victim's phone or other electronic devices as 'next of kin', which could compromise existing evidence.

Officers should remain alert to attempts to interfere with:

- notifying wider family members of the death
- release of the body
- child contact or custody arrangements
- witness interference

Where there is evidence of any offences having been committed, officers should arrest and charge accordingly.

For further information, go to:

- [Domestic homicides and suspected victim suicides 2022 to 2023 report](#)
- [Categories for unexpected death investigations](#)
- [CPS guidance on homicide: murder, manslaughter, infanticide and causing or allowing the death or serious injury of a child or vulnerable adult](#)
- [CPS guidance on controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate family relationship](#)
- [APP on suicide and bereavement response](#)

Vulnerable adult abuse investigation

Under [section 42 of the Care Act 2014](#), local authorities have a statutory duty to act where there is reasonable cause to suspect that an adult is at risk. This duty applies where an adult in the local authority area meets all of the following criteria:

- has needs for care and support, whether or not that is provided by the local authority

- is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect
- as a result of those needs, this adult is unable to protect themselves from the risk of, or experience of, abuse or neglect

Where these conditions are met, the local authority must make whatever enquiries are necessary to determine:

- what, if any, actions should be taken
- which agency or individual should take that action

A section 42 enquiry may result in a referral to the police for further investigation.

The **safe care at home review** (Department of Health and Social Care and Home Office) found that relationships between vulnerable adults and carers can create circumstances that increase the risk of abuse. Key factors include:

- dependence on carers
- misplaced trust
- manipulation through gradual grooming

Victims may feel unable to report abuse due to isolation, reliance on the perpetrator for care or uncertainty about alternative support.

Where a domestic abuse investigation involves suspected abuse by a familial or intimate carer, officers should consider that the case may constitute domestic abuse. In some cases, the domestic abuse link may only become apparent later in the investigation. For example, this may apply where an apparent case of neglect reveals financial exploitation by a family member, amounting to financial abuse under **section 42(3) of the Care Act 2014**.

Officers should look out for signs of other forms of domestic abuse in households where a vulnerable adult is present.

For further information, go to:

- **APP on adults at risk**
- **Vulnerability-related risks guidelines**
- **Care and support statutory guidance**

- [Safe care at home review](#)

Safeguarding

The Lord Chancellor's Department paper [Who Decides?](#) defines a vulnerable adult as:

“A person who is or may need community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness, and who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.”

Under [section 44 of the Mental Capacity Act 2005](#) (MCA), the ill-treatment or wilful neglect of a person who lacks capacity is an offence.

This can be committed by anyone responsible for that person's care and support, including familial carers or relatives holding power of attorney. It may therefore also constitute domestic abuse.

Wilful neglect normally refers to a deliberate failure by a person to do something they knew they had a duty to do. Ill-treatment covers both deliberate ill-treatment and reckless acts resulting in ill-treatment.

The MCA requires that adults are presumed to have capacity unless proven otherwise. Where a person lacks capacity, any decision made on their behalf must be made in their best interests.

Officers should:

- seek supervisory advice and apply professional judgement, balancing safety and autonomy
- prioritise safety if there are reasonable grounds to believe the person cannot make an informed decision about their welfare

When responding to suspected abuse of a vulnerable adult, officers should consider the [care and support statutory guidance](#), which highlights key factors:

- the adult's needs for care and support
- the adult's risk of abuse or neglect
- the adult's ability to protect themselves or the ability of their networks to increase the support they offer
- the impact on the adult and their wishes
- the possible impact on important relationships

- potential of action and increasing risk to the adult
- the risk of repeated or increasingly serious acts involving children, or another adult at risk of abuse or neglect

These considerations should inform application of the [national decision model \(NDM\)](#) when responding to domestic abuse incidents involving a vulnerable person, or in a household where a vulnerable person is present. Although consent should normally be obtained for referral to adult services or other intervention, the person's safety must be the overriding consideration.

Officers should:

- establish whether any vulnerable adults are ordinarily resident at the address
- ensure that they see the person to ensure they are safe and well
- ascertain whether they can access support if needed – for example, whether they are able to call the police in the event of an incident – and carry out immediate safety planning if not
- flag the need for early consideration of special measures if an offence is suspected of which they are a victim or witness
- make the appropriate referral to adult services if there is any concern for the vulnerable person's welfare or safety

For further information, go to:

- [Adults at risk APP](#)

Tags

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