

# Victim strategy

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## Victim support and welfare

Officers must comply with the [Ministry of Justice Code of Practice for Victims of Crime \(the Victims' Code\)](#). Victims of domestic abuse or sexual offences have a right to enhanced support under the Victims' Code unless they choose not to receive it.

Police officers must consider the support for victims of domestic abuse. Officers should inform victims of [Victim Support \(VS\)](#), community-based outreach services and places of safety, many of which are dependent on local arrangements. Officers should also be aware of – and refer victims to – appropriate support services, including those by and for ethnic minority groups and marginalised groups. They should take into consideration any increased risk to the victim that a referral might create.

Forces should keep and regularly update a list of the following, so that the victim can be made aware of them and make their own choices about what services to access:

- [services](#) in their area
- where they are based
- what areas they work in
- relevant contact details

This list should be made available to first responders to assist with supporting victims.

Go to [safety planning](#) for more options and example safety plans.

When providing written materials or information, officers should be mindful that these may be discovered by the perpetrator. They should discuss this risk with the victim before leaving any materials and should ensure that nothing is left in a place where it could be easily found.

## Victim property recovery

Where a victim requests to recover property from a shared or former residence, officers should ensure that the process is carried out safely and with support. The same safeguards apply as for [suspect property recovery](#). Only reasonable quantities of property should be retrieved.

Officers should recognise that post-separation abuse is a known risk factor for homicide. Victims seeking to recover belongings may be at increased risk of further harm. Officers should remain alert to signs of intimidation, coercion or manipulation by the suspect during any recovery arrangements.

## Keeping the victim informed

All officers should communicate effectively with victims to maintain trust and ensure safety. The [Victims' Code](#) provides the framework for these responsibilities.

Victims should be notified of:

- arrest, interview under caution or release of the suspect
- any bail decisions, including conditions or variations
- charging decisions, out-of-court disposals or decisions not to prosecute
- the date, time and location of the first court hearing

Officers should also refer to the [Women's Aid Survivor's Charter](#), which highlights victims' expectations of being respected, believed and informed.

## Bail and breaches

Investigating officers should discuss with – and inform victims of – [bail outcomes](#) and conditions prior to the suspect's release, ensuring that safety plans are updated accordingly.

The [witness care unit \(WCU\)](#) or designated police contact must also update victims within one working day of any court bail decisions or changes to conditions. Officers should explain:

- what bail conditions mean in practice
- that compliance is the defendant's responsibility
- how to report any breaches of bail conditions

A [proactive response to breaches](#), through prompt investigations and communication, reinforces victim confidence and demonstrates police commitment to protection. Victims must be informed of

the outcomes if the suspect is arrested for breaching bail conditions.

Officers should also consider:

- prioritising timely and sensitive communication with victims
- updating risk assessments and safety plans following any case development
- maintaining accurate records of all victim notifications
- collaborating with WCUs, CPS and [independent domestic violence advisers \(IDVAs\)](#) to ensure consistent information
- reinforcing that the burden of compliance with bail conditions rests on the suspect

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Pre-release considerations](#)

## Discontinuance

If a force decision is made not to prosecute the suspect or to discontinue proceedings, the [Victims' Code](#) specifies that a domestic abuse victim should be notified of this within one working day.

This is a police obligation where:

- the police make the decision to discontinue the case prior to charge
- the decision is made by the CPS during a pre-charge consultation with the police

Where the CPS discontinue proceedings after charge, it is their duty to notify the victim within the timescales.

## Contact from prisoners

Victims and/or witnesses have the right to be protected from intimidation or interference. If a victim or witness receives communication from a person who is connected to their case, they should contact the police officer dealing with their case.

Officers (or the victim) can request in the case file that prison staff:

- prevent a perpetrator from contacting the victim by phone, letter or through visits
- should withhold contact details

For further information, go to:

- [Post-arrest management of suspect and case file](#)

The government hosts an online form, [Unwanted prisoner contact](#), to notify of unwanted contact from prisoners and request that it be stopped.

## **Victim personal statement, restraining orders and special measures**

### **Victim personal statement (VPS)**

Under the [Victims' Code](#), officers must offer every domestic abuse victim the opportunity to make a VPS, even if they do not provide any other witness statement. Investigators should follow the guidance set out in the [victim and witness care APP](#).

### **Victim's views on restraining orders**

From the outset of an investigation, officers should consider whether a restraining order may be required at the conclusion of criminal proceedings. Officers should record these views in the victim's statement and include them in the initial file submission. Understanding that a victim seeks protection through an order can support applications for remand in custody or help determine appropriate bail conditions. These should, where possible, mirror the terms requested for the order.

Even if the victim later withdraws support for prosecution, their initial views can still inform sentencing or support a non-conviction restraining order. Officers should explain that restraining orders can prohibit or regulate contact. For example, they may prevent the defendant from attending the victim's home while allowing limited contact about child arrangements.

Victims should understand that breaching a restraining order is a serious criminal offence that may result in a custodial sentence, making it an effective ongoing protection measure.

For the court to consider a restraining order, particularly a non-conviction order, it should have a record of the victim's views. Officers should ensure that these are gathered, recorded and included in the prosecution file.

Officers should also record the impact of the abuse on the victim within the initial testimony. The effect of the abuse on the victim is a required element in cases of controlling or coercive behaviour.

## Special measures

The police must take all reasonable steps to identify vulnerable or intimidated victims. The police should also:

- explain the provisions included in special measures to any such victim who is likely to be called as a witness in criminal proceedings and may be eligible for special measures
- record any views that the victim expresses about applying for special measures

For further information, go to:

- [APP on working with victims and witnesses](#)
- [APP on special measures for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses](#)
- [CPS Legal Guidance on Special Measure](#)

## Supporting roles

### Witness care units

A witness care officer (WCO) may be allocated as a single point of contact for victims and witnesses in each case. The WCO should be responsible for providing trial updates, sending court warnings and communicating hearing outcomes. In domestic abuse cases, particularly those assessed as high-risk, it may be more appropriate for the investigating officer to remain the victim's main point of contact. This is due to the need for ongoing risk management and safeguarding.

WCOs should be trained in basic risk assessment, so that they can recognise danger signs and refer any concerns to the investigating officer for an updated risk assessment. This is particularly important if the WCO is the single point of contact for the victim.

For general information on the role of WCUs, see APP on [WCU](#). Officers should also refer to the [Victims' Code](#) for details on WCU responsibilities towards victims.

### Independent domestic violence advisers

IDVAs provide specialist support for victims of domestic abuse, particularly those at high risk of harm. In some areas, they work with victims referred to [multi-agency risk assessment conferences for domestic abuse \(MARACs\)](#) and are often the victim's main point of contact.

Officers should:

- identify victims who may require IDVA support
- inform victims about the role of IDVAs
- make referrals to IDVA services where risk assessments indicate high risk or where the victim requests support

Supervisors should:

- ensure clear communication between officers and IDVAs
- keep IDVAs informed of operational risks to their own safety
- include IDVAs in briefings or updates on domestic abuse procedures

For further information, go to:

- [IDVA statutory guidance](#)

## **Independent sexual violence advisers (ISVAs)**

Officers should involve ISVAs for victims of sexual offending, including those within domestic abuse contexts. Officers should also work with ISVAs to coordinate safety, healthcare access and support across agencies.

ISVAs support victims of sexual offences, including those within domestic abuse contexts. They often work from sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) or specialist support organisations and ensure that safety is coordinated across agencies.

For further information, go to:

- [ISVA statutory guidance](#)

## **Young people's violence advisers (YPVAs)**

Officers should consider referral to a YPVA for victims under 18 years. YPVAs provide specialist support for victims of relationship abuse aged under 18. They also ensure age-appropriate safety planning, emotional support and advocacy throughout the investigation and court process.

## **Withdrawal of support**

When a victim indicates they no longer wish to support a prosecution, a domestic abuse specialist officer should engage with the victim to offer them special measures or other support to help them

through the CJS. The specialist will take a withdrawal statement. Officers should explain to victims that their withdrawal statement may still be used as evidence in ongoing or future criminal or family court proceedings. If the victim indicates a wish to withdraw support for the prosecution, the officer in the case should notify the CPS without delay.

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Taking comprehensive withdrawal statements](#)

Withdrawal statements should be forwarded to the CPS and accompanied by a background report from the officer in the case, which should include:

- the officer's views on the case, including any suspicions of witness intimidation or pressure, if these are not already included in the withdrawal statement
- details of any identified risks to the safety of the victim, children or any other person
- details of the support available to the victim (for example, access to an IDVA)
- how the victim might respond to being compelled to attend court
- the likely impact of proceeding (or not proceeding) with the case on the victim and any children

For further information, go to:

- [CPS domestic abuse guidelines section on withdrawals and witness summons](#)

## Investigative strategy

### Identifying the primary perpetrator and managing counter-allegations

Officers should avoid making assumptions about which party in a relationship is the victim and which is the perpetrator. This applies to all types of relationships, whether heterosexual, same-sex or familial (non-intimate partner). Officers should probe the situation and be aware that the primary aggressor is not necessarily the person who was first to use force or threatening behaviour.

When both parties report assaults or present with injuries, officers should determine the primary perpetrator to avoid criminalising a victim who has acted in self-defence. They should consider the wider context, including any history of abuse or controlling behaviour. They should also recognise

that perpetrators often appear more vocal or confident than victims. Officers should be alert to false or malicious reports used as part of coercive control. They should avoid assuming that the person who called the police is the victim.

Counter-allegations require officers to evaluate each party's complaint separately and carry out immediate further investigation at the scene, or as soon as practicable, to establish the true dynamics of the abuse. Officers should observe and record:

- body language and power imbalance in the relationship
- comparative severity and nature of injuries
- any threats made towards the other party, child or family members
- any history of abuse, violence or prior counter-allegations
- signs of defensive or pre-emptive action taken to protect oneself or others
- statements or observations from third-party witnesses

For further information, go to:

- [dual arrests](#)
- [CPS domestic abuse guidelines for prosecutors, self defence and counter-allegations](#)

## Police perpetrators of domestic abuse

Forces should respond decisively and visibly to reports of police-perpetrated domestic abuse (PPDA). Police officers and staff hold positions of trust and authority. Failure to uphold professional standards in this area may have an impact on victim safety, organisational integrity, and public confidence in policing.

Forces should ensure they have appropriate measures in place to respond to PPDA allegations.

These include:

- ensuring impartial, joined-up criminal and conduct investigations, conducted by people with the right knowledge and skills
- managing the extra risks associated with having domestic abuse perpetrators working in police roles
- ensuring that the additional risks and concerns for victims of having a police suspect are recognised and responded to

- measures to ensure an impartial response, and to give confidence to the victim of this
- measures to protect case confidentiality and investigation integrity

Officers should consider extra risks associated with PPDA cases, including (but not limited to):

- the risk that the police suspect could use their police knowledge, status and powers to deter the victim from reporting, as well as to discredit and cause harm to the victim once a report has been made
- the risk of repercussions at work for police victims
- prior connections between colleagues in force unduly influencing the response (ranging from bias towards the suspect or victim, to improper manipulation of police processes)
- those responding or investigating:
  - feeling uncomfortable or awkward about intruding on the private lives of policing colleagues
  - thinking it can be in both the victim's and the suspect's interest to minimise the police involvement in the allegation
  - thinking that those working in policing are trustworthy and are unlikely to abuse or lie

Forces should have procedures in place to ensure that PPDA allegations are investigated by someone with no prior connection to any of those involved. This should be true for both the criminal investigation and the misconduct response.

Forces should apply safeguarding measures to ensure and demonstrate an impartial investigation and case decisions. For example, case files should include formal 'declaration of conflicts of interest' records. Senior officers should record the rationale for investigation ownership decisions.

Officers may refer a case for external force investigation when one or more of the following apply:

- There are concerns that truly independent investigators cannot be found in force. For example, this may apply in smaller forces or in cases involving a suspect who, due to seniority or length of service, is well known in force.
- Victim trust and confidence cannot be secured another way.

Local plans should include procedures to mitigate any unintended consequences to the investigative process that may be caused by referring a case to an external force for investigation. This includes any impacts on the speed and quality of the investigation and/or victim engagement.

Forces must treat reports of domestic abuse involving police suspects as police complaints or conduct matters. This is essential for:

- ensuring that appropriate consideration is given to the need to suspend or restrict officers while an investigation is ongoing
- referring officers to disciplinary proceedings as appropriate
- enabling independent oversight and scrutiny of the case handling
- keeping victims appropriately informed of the progress of investigations and subsequent disciplinary proceedings

For PPDA conduct investigations where the victim is a police officer or member of police staff in the same force as the suspect, the victim is not legally able to be the complainant. However, the force should treat the victim as an 'interested person' in the conduct matters. This gives them similar rights to a complainant to be kept informed of the progress of the investigation. They will also be kept informed about and attend any misconduct proceedings that follow.

For further information, go to:

- [Police perpetrated domestic abuse: Report on Centre for Women's Justice super complaint](#)
- [Annex B: Innovations in force practice](#)

## **Immediate referral**

When a report of domestic abuse involving a police suspect is received, the first recipient of the information should refer the matter to a supervising officer. The supervising officer should be the rank of inspector or above.

The supervising officer should pass the information to all the following:

- commander for the local policing area
- nominated NPCC officer
- domestic abuse coordinator or supervisor
- where applicable, the child abuse investigation unit (CAIU) supervisor or equivalent
- professional standards department (PSD), which should have its own policies on suspension or movement of the staff involved

If the suspect is the nominated NPCC officer, the supervisor should pass the information to the chief officer. If the suspect is the chief officer, the information should be passed directly to the police and crime commissioner.

## **Inter-force arrangements**

Where the case involves a suspect who is a police officer from a different police force area, the nominated NPCC officer from the receiving force should:

- provide a report to the nominated NPCC officer in the force that employs the suspect
- ensure that the PSD in the employer force is regularly updated about the investigation and any prosecution process

## **Reviews of the report**

Investigating officers should prepare a report, under the direction of the nominated NPCC officer, for consideration by:

- chief officers
- PSDs
- any specialist scanning group that collects intelligence and reports and assesses cases

The report should review:

- risk factors relating to the case
- public protection
- community impact assessment
- public confidence and reassurance
- communication strategies

## **Immediate referral access to records**

Forces should ensure that safeguards are in place regarding access to record, to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of the investigation. Safeguards may include:

- ensuring that the supervising officer and/or the PSD are notified of any attempt to access records relating to a case involving a police officer as a suspect
- using a particular identifying 'flag' for cases involving police suspects

Any special provisions relating to access to records should ensure that access is not limited in a way that jeopardises the protection of the victim, children or any other person. Consideration needs to be given to ensuring the privacy of victims, but this should be proportionate to the duty to protect them from further harm.

## **Providing support to victims**

Police forces should ensure that special considerations are given to support the victims of police domestic abuse offenders, including victims who are also police officers.

Forces should ensure that victims of PPDA can report and receive support through safe, impartial and confidential mechanisms.

Police perpetrators may exploit their professional status, access to information or operational knowledge to:

- intimidate victims
- manipulate investigations
- dissuade reporting

Forces should ensure that these risks are proactively mitigated through:

- information management controls
- oversight of access to systems
- independent supervision of all related investigative and welfare processes

Victims should be offered confidential and independent support from both internal and external sources. This should include access to external victim advocacy services and designated domestic abuse champions within the force. These champions should be trained to provide peer-level advice and support to police personnel affected by abuse.

Forces should ensure that victims are informed of the force's domestic abuse workplace policy. They should also ensure that victims receive clear, regular updates on both criminal and internal misconduct investigations. Forces should advise the person being supported of their formal status in each process – for example, as a complainant, interested person or victim.

Senior officers should ensure that communication with victims is handled by an appropriately trained and senior officer, with support from a domestic abuse or child abuse investigator or a family liaison officer where appropriate.

Police officers may also be victims of non-police perpetrators of domestic abuse. Police forces should support their employee and safeguard them and their colleagues, under the same obligation as any other employer.

For further information, go to:

- [Victim support and welfare](#)
- [Victims' Code](#)

## Using interpreters at the scene

If there is a need for an interpreter at the scene, an approved interpreter should be sourced if possible. If no approved interpreter is immediately available and there is an urgent need to secure safety or establish the basic facts, officers may use a telephone interpreting service. This should be limited to preliminary inquiries only, pending the arrival or arrangement of an approved interpreter.

Officers should only use family members as interpreters as a last resort and only for the purpose of securing immediate safety. This applies particularly to children. Some family members may be vulnerable to abuse or intimidation by the perpetrator and asking them to interpret could put them at risk. A suspected perpetrator should never be used as an interpreter. In cases of HBA, the use of any family member is never appropriate.

Where a family member or member of the public is used to interpret, officers should record the decision and rationale. They should also verify the accuracy of any information obtained. For example, this may be by assessing whether the explanation aligns with available evidence or whether another person can corroborate key details.

Further options may include foreign language-speaking officers or the use of pictorial cards and other communication aids. Officers should only use these options for securing immediate safety.

For further information about use of interpreters, go to:

- [using interpreters during interviews](#)

## Victim interview strategy

Officers should follow national standards for investigative interviewing, as set out in legislation and [APP on investigative interviewing](#). Before conducting any victim interview, officers should ensure that the interview plan meets these requirements and that the process is appropriate to the victim's needs and circumstances.

Information obtained from victim and witness interviews should be incorporated into risk assessments and safety planning to ensure ongoing protection and support. Officers should take care not to disclose confidential information, such as the address of a refuge or place of safety, during a recorded interview. If such information is inadvertently disclosed, the officer should inform the CPS immediately, so that editing or redaction can be arranged before the material is used in proceedings.

When dealing with child witnesses, officers must base decisions about interviews on the child's age, circumstances and the seriousness of the alleged offence. Competence to give evidence depends on understanding, not age. Children of any age can provide testimony if they can understand and answer questions being asked of them. The CPS prosecutor will assess whether the child is capable of giving clear and reliable evidence and whether giving evidence in court is in the child's and the public's interest.

Children can consent to being interviewed even if their parents refuse permission. In such cases, officers must document all consent requests and consult children's social care as appropriate. All visually recorded interviews with children must comply with [achieving best evidence \(ABE\) guidance](#). Officers should consider the use of a registered intermediary at the earliest stage when interviewing children or other vulnerable individuals.

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Conducting the victim interview](#)

## Evidence gathering

It is common for victims not to support – or to appear not to support – the police, an investigation or criminal proceedings for a variety of reasons. Officers should not assume that investigating the report in such circumstances will not result in a positive outcome. They should take steps to build a

case for a potential evidence-led prosecution, namely, a prosecution based on hearsay or circumstantial evidence, or featuring a hostile witness.

Officers should ensure that they read and use the [Joint NPCC and CPS evidence gathering checklist for use by police forces and CPS in cases of domestic abuse](#).

At the scene, officers should consider calling a crime scene examiner and should think about:

- [physical evidence](#) ? clothing and bedding, weapons, signs of disturbance
- [forensics](#) ? blood pattern distribution, other biological evidence, footwear, DNA
- [photographic evidence](#)
- [CCTV](#)
- [house-to-house enquiries](#)
- [technology and social media](#) ? mobile phones, social media, email

Additional information and intelligence gathering to build on call handler information could include:

- further database checks – [PNC](#), [PND](#), [ViSOR](#)
- [foreign intelligence checks](#)
- [bad character evidence](#)
- [medical records](#)
- [financial information](#)
- [prison intelligence](#)
- [covert tactics](#)

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Lines of enquiry](#)
- [Checklist: Use of photographic evidence](#)
- [Checklist: Evidence-led prosecution](#)

## Building an evidence-led case

Officers should ensure they are proactive, with the aim of building an evidence-led case. Building an evidence-led case that does not rely on the support of the victim is challenging but can be effective, as demonstrated by the following examples of successful evidence-led prosecutions.

Evidence	Result
Partial admissions, injury photos and bad character evidence of the accused.	Guilty plea
Initial account given on body-worn video, denied but no account given by the defendant, and injury photos.	Guilty plea
999 call, injuries captured on body-worn video and hearsay evidence from the victim recorded in the responding officer's statement.	Found guilty after trial
Victim's 999 call as 'res gestae' and officer's description of injuries.	Found guilty after trial
Victim's account on body-worn video as hearsay (witness unable to give evidence through fear).	Found guilty after trial
Victim's account recorded in officer's pocket notebook entry as hearsay (witness unable to give evidence through fear) and injury photographs.	Found guilty after trial
Victim's account recorded in section 9 statement as hearsay (witness cannot be found), injury photographs and independent eyewitness testimony.	Found guilty after trial
Circumstantial evidence from a neighbour who hears an argument between the victim and perpetrator and notes injury to the victim in the immediate aftermath.	Found guilty after trial

Evidence	Result
Victim's original written account supported by other key evidence, including evidence of injury, preferred by court over hostile victim's contradictory live evidence at trial.	Found guilty after trial

For further information, go to:

- [Code for Crown Prosecutors](#)
- [CPS domestic abuse](#)
- [Joint NPCC and CPS evidence gathering checklist for use by police forces and CPS in cases of domestic abuse](#)
- [Director's guidance on charging](#)
- [Statutory guidance on controlling or coercive behaviour](#)
- [Gathering evidence and case building](#)

## Lines of enquiry

Investigating officers should explore all reasonable lines of enquiry to establish the full circumstances of domestic abuse incidents. Enquiries should not focus solely on the current report but should seek to uncover any pattern of coercive, controlling or threatening behaviour.

Officers should not rely on the immediate account provided at the scene. They should review all available information to identify repeat patterns or escalation, including:

- previous incident reports
- intelligence logs
- statements
- third-party information

Officers should place the current report within the broader context of the relationship. They should identify whether previous reports have been recorded as verbal only or minor, and should assess whether these form part of a course of conduct.

During an investigation, enquiries may reveal non-recent abuse or sexual offences. Officers should:

- record all disclosures accurately and in detail
- notify a supervising officer immediately
- consider whether a separate investigation is required or if the information can be used to support the current case

If disclosures are made by previous partners or other witnesses, officers should treat these as potential separate cases. Where appropriate, investigations should be linked to strengthen evidential value and establish patterns of offending.

Officers should remain aware of statutory time limits, such as the six-month limit for summary-only offences under [section 127 of the Magistrates' Court Act 1980](#). Where a separate prosecution is not possible, evidence from earlier incidents should be considered for use as bad character evidence to support the current prosecution.

For offences of common assault or battery amounting to domestic abuse (as defined in section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021), [section 39A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988](#) provides extended time limits for proceedings. This applies to offences committed on or after 28 June 2022.

Proceedings can be commenced when both of the following apply:

- within two years from the date of the offence
- within six months from the date when the victim first made a statement or video-recorded interview (VRI) intended for use as evidence and provided to police

This provision overrides the usual six-month limit for summary-only offences.

For further information, go to:

- [CPS domestic abuse guidelines for prosecutors](#)
- [Domestic violence disclosure scheme \(Clare's Law\)](#)
- [Checklist: lines of enquiry](#)
- [Checklist: spotlight on controlling or coercive behaviour](#)

## Initial enquiries with victims and witnesses

Officers should obtain an initial account from victims and witnesses as soon as it is safe and practicable to do so. The purpose is to secure early information that may support the investigation and preserve key evidence. Initial enquiries should be handled sensitively, recognising the impact of trauma and coercive control on a victim's ability to recall or disclose information.

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Gaining a first account from a victim or witness](#)

If a victim or witness's first account is recorded using BWV, they should be given the opportunity to review the recording before any further interview or before making and signing a statement. Any subsequent interview or statement should note that the first account was recorded on BVW and reviewed. Victims and witnesses should only review footage that relates to their own account.

Officers may record audio only by diverting or covering the camera lens.

If a victim or witness may require an Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview by a specialist interviewer, officers using BVW should limit questions to confirming:

- whether a criminal offence has occurred
- where it happened
- who is responsible
- whether the victim is safe

For further information, go to:

- [NPCC body-worn video guidance](#)

## First responders as a witness

First responders should prepare or provide a detailed statement for inclusion in any prosecution file.

If a first responder provides their account through an interview at a later stage, supervisors should be aware that attending or managing domestic abuse incidents may prompt officers to disclose personal experiences of domestic abuse. Supervisors should be prepared to offer welfare support.

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Statement of the first officer at the scene](#)

## Evidence from other agencies

Investigating officers should seek evidence held by partner agencies. Such evidence may include:

- photographs
- body maps
- witness statements
- records
- items safeguarded on behalf of the victim, such as passport or birth certificate

Body maps allow medical professionals to record the location and nature of injuries on the victim's body. They may provide evidential value when victims decline to have photographs taken. Officers should familiarise themselves with the procedures used by local agencies to record, store and share such evidence, ensuring that appropriate consent and data-sharing agreements are in place.

In some cases, partner agencies may be better placed to obtain evidence directly from victims. Victims may feel more comfortable allowing trusted medical staff or support workers to document injuries or record statements before they are ready to disclose the abuse formally to police. Investigators should recognise and make use of these opportunities to preserve valuable early evidence.

Forces should consider supporting local agencies by providing equipment and practical guidance to facilitate high-quality evidence gathering. This may include access to digital cameras, body map forms and secure evidence notebooks. This may be accompanied by clear instructions on evidential standards and chain of custody requirements.

## Contextual information from other agencies

In cases where the victim reports ongoing or historic abuse, officers should make targeted enquiries with agencies that may hold relevant contextual information. This information can help demonstrate patterns of behaviour, escalation or coercive control. Examples include:

- housing providers, who may hold records of repeated property damage (for example, broken doors, holes in walls) or complaints from neighbours about disturbances
- education services, which may record referrals to [Operation Encompass](#) or restrictions on parental access to children at school

For further information, go to:

- [Partnership working](#)

## Physical evidence

## Victim and witness evidence

Officers should follow the guidance set out in the APP on [working with victims and witnesses](#).

## Sources of intelligence and evidence

Officers should consider the following sources of intelligence and evidence when investigating domestic abuse.

### Police National Computer (PNC)

Officers should conduct PNC checks for all suspects, victims and relevant addresses to identify bail conditions, protective orders and markers. They should also check vehicles linked to the home or incident location, as [automatic number plate recognition \(ANPR\)](#) data may verify movements or associations.

### Police National Database (PND)

Officers should conduct PND checks where the perpetrator has lived or previously offended in other force areas. If no results are found, officers should contact other relevant forces directly to obtain warnings or intelligence from their local systems

### ViSOR

Officers should check whether the perpetrator is recorded on ViSOR, particularly in high-risk cases. Where a ViSOR (VS) marker appears on the PNC, officers should contact the public protection unit (PPU) or relevant ViSOR-licensed staff for further information.

## Foreign intelligence checks

Officers should conduct foreign intelligence checks for all foreign national suspects or UK nationals with significant time abroad. They should also consider checks for foreign victims and witnesses, using results to inform threat and risk assessments.

Officers should also consider:

- submitting foreign conviction requests via the [ACRO Criminal Records Office](#), particularly for urgent cases
- liaising with the international liaison officer or international assistance unit (IAU) for all cross-border enquiries
- accessing additional intelligence through INTERPOL and Europol

For further information, go to:

- [APP on international investigations](#)

## House-to-house enquiries

Officers should identify and plan [house-to-house](#) enquiries early in the investigation, limiting the scope appropriately. For example, this may include immediate neighbours, nearby schools or workplaces linked to the victim or suspect.

Officers should use a standardised questionnaire with open questions to elicit information without revealing sensitive details. They should also exercise discretion to avoid disclosing the nature of domestic abuse allegations or the sexual orientation of involved parties.

## Automatic number plate recognition (ANPR)

Officers should record details of all vehicles associated with the household and should use ANPR to verify or challenge accounts of movements by the victim or perpetrator. Officers should also consider related offences, such as driving under the influence or while disqualified.

For further information, go to:

- [APP on ANPR](#)

## Technology and social media

Officers should examine mobile phones, email accounts and social media for relevant evidence, including threats, harassment, coercive control or contact between the victim and perpetrator.

Officers should ask victims if any evidence exists on their devices, such as threatening messages, calls or social media posts. Depending on what is available, officers may record this evidence by photographing the screen, transcribing messages or arranging a full forensic download.

If a victim's phone is provided for evidence and it is their only means of contact, officers should consider whether a replacement phone is needed to maintain access to emergency services and support.

Social media platforms may contain posts or messages that support the victim's account or show further offending, such as online harassment or threats to share intimate images. Officers should record relevant account details and secure evidence following force procedures.

If there are signs that spyware or tracking software has been used, officers should treat this as a potential offence and seek technical support to examine the devices.

For further information, go to:

- [APP on digital exhibits management](#)
- [Home Office Code of Practice: Extraction of information from electronic devices](#)
- [CPS guidance](#)

## Financial information

Officers should examine bank statements and financial records for signs of economic abuse or coercive control. Evidence may establish dependency, control or exploitation within the relationship.

## Covert surveillance

Forces should consider covert policing techniques only when:

- they have given due consideration to all the circumstances of the case
- conventional policing methods have failed or are likely to fail

If covert tactics are being considered, officers should understand that such tactics can also escalate risk – for example, if the perpetrator discovers a hidden camera.

## Covert human intelligence sources

There may be circumstances where victims or witnesses provide intelligence on other criminal activities by the suspect. In these instances, officers should forward the information to the intelligence unit for evaluation. Officers should ensure that established risk factors for domestic abuse are identified and monitored.

For further information, go to:

- [Home Office Covert Human Intelligence Sources: Code of Practice](#)

## Prison intelligence

Officers should liaise with prison intelligence units for information about suspects in custody. Prison intelligence may identify breaches of bail, harassment or intimidation of witnesses.

## Bad character evidence

Officers should consider whether a suspect's previous behaviour could be used as [bad character evidence](#) under [section 101 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003](#). Bad character evidence may include previous convictions, acquittals or other behaviour considered by a reasonable person to be reprehensible, such as bullying, racism or antisocial conduct.

Officers should:

- check the [PNC](#) for relevant history, including any [ViSOR](#) markers
- consult the [PND](#) or local force systems
- complete [foreign intelligence checks](#)
- record and explore information from partner agencies, such as housing associations, local councils or workplaces, where misconduct has been reported

Officers should also identify any previous incidents showing a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour that occurred before the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour came into force in December 2015. These incidents cannot be charged but may be admissible as bad character evidence.

For further information, go to:

- [CPS legal guidance on bad character evidence](#)

- [CPS domestic abuse guidelines for prosecutors, previous domestic abuse incidents and serial perpetrators](#)

## Medical records

When victims give consent to the release of their medical information, officers should obtain records from a variety of sources. This may include:

- general practitioners
- hospital emergency departments
- mental health professionals
- dental practices
- obstetric services

Records may provide valuable evidence of physical injuries, mental health impacts and incidents, such as miscarriages, that are linked to abuse.

For further information, go to:

- [Information sharing](#)

Officers should explain to victims that consent is being sought only for access to relevant medical information, not their entire records. Officers should reassure victims that any unrelated or sensitive details will be excluded from disclosure to protect their privacy and safety. For example, this may apply to information about a termination or other personal matters.

## 999 recordings

Audio recordings of 999 calls can provide a useful source of evidence to support the prosecution of domestic abuse-related offences. Investigating officers should examine recordings to identify the following:

- caller's demeanour
- background noise, including comments from witnesses, suspects and victims
- any first description (res gestae) of the incident as provided by the witness or victim

Officers should follow local guidelines for the storage and retention of 999 recordings. They should be included as part of the prosecution file sent to the CPS, where relevant. Police forces should

ensure that any guidance given to call takers in relation to operating procedures in domestic abuse cases is also made available to the judicial process.

## Res gestae

Res gestae refers to statements or actions that are so closely connected to an event that they form part of it. In domestic abuse investigations, such evidence can be powerful, particularly where the victim is distressed or fearful and reluctant to engage in proceedings. The common law doctrine of res gestae is preserved under [section 118\(4\) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003](#) as an exception to the hearsay rule.

Officers should record all statements accurately and in full, noting the time, emotional state and circumstances in which they were made. These details may later support the statement's admissibility. Where possible, officers should capture these comments using body-worn video to preserve the context and the victim's demeanour. Written notes should reflect any visible signs of distress or injury and record the immediacy of the statement in relation to the event.

Proceeding solely based on res gestae evidence is generally difficult if the victim is available but has chosen not to attend court. The court may exclude this evidence if it considers that it is being used to avoid calling the victim as a witness. However, case law – such as *Barnaby v DPP* [2015] EWHC 232 (Admin) – confirms that it can be appropriate where there is a real risk that a victim would suffer further harm through cooperation with the prosecution. In such cases, the investigating officer should evidence and document the risk of harm.

Officers should identify and preserve any res gestae evidence at the earliest opportunity. Officers should recognise its potential to support an evidence-led prosecution when the victim cannot or will not give testimony.

For further information, go to:

- [CPS guidance on hearsay](#)
- [Prosecutions based on hearsay evidence](#)

## Photographic and visually recorded evidence

Photographic and video evidence supports evidence-led prosecutions, strengthens case files and provides visual corroboration.

Officers should consider opportunities to capture photographic and visually recorded evidence at the earliest possible stage, ensuring that all images are:

- relevant
- proportionate
- gathered in accordance with victim care principles and evidential standards

Officers should gather photographic and video material throughout the investigation and prosecution process. This may include:

- injuries to victims and suspects.
- damage to property, household disruption and weapons used
- text messages, social media posts or other digital communications
- medical images taken for diagnostic purposes (for example, X-rays) that demonstrate internal injuries

CSIs should be used wherever possible in domestic abuse cases. Where CSI attendance is not immediately available, attending officers should capture initial photographs at first contact.

Photographic evidence is particularly valuable for:

- supporting evidence-led prosecutions where the victim does not engage in proceedings
- supporting applications for remand in custody, as colour images often have greater evidential impact than written descriptions
- allowing comparison with later images to show injury progression
- capturing temporary or subtle marks that may fade quickly
- helping to assess the degree of force used

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Use of photographic evidence](#)

## Injury photos

Officers should not delay taking photographs while waiting for a forensic photographer, as victims may not attend later appointments. Non-professional photographs are preferable to having no photographic record.

When photographing injuries, officers should:

- capture all non-intimate injuries described by the victim, including those concealed by hair
- take initial photographs at first contact and arrange a follow-up visit where injuries may develop or become more visible
- use appropriate lighting and techniques to ensure clarity – take extra care with darker skin tones, where bruising may be less visible
- record any areas that the victim does not wish to show or that were not observed, to prevent later challenge

Officers should ensure that photographs during initial contact are included in the handover process.

## **Closed-circuit television (CCTV)**

CCTV may provide strong evidence in domestic abuse investigations by:

- corroborating a victim's account
- challenging a perpetrator's versions of events
- showing the context or pattern of offending behaviour

Officers should identify and secure CCTV from all possible sources, including public and private systems.

For further information, go to:

- [APP on CCTV](#)

## **Body worn video (BWV)**

The investigating officer should review body-worn video (BWV) footage as part of the evidence-gathering process and determine how it will be presented in the case file (for example, as unused material, prima facie evidence). This decision should consider victim care and consent.

Recordings should capture:

- the scene upon arrival
- the demeanour of all parties, including distress, fear or intoxication
- spontaneous statements made by victims, suspects or witnesses

For further information, go to:

- [NPCC BVW guidance](#)

## Victim care and consent

When capturing photographic or video evidence, officers should prioritise the victim's safety and welfare. They should do the following:

- Explain that the images may be used as evidence in criminal or civil proceedings, such as child contact hearings.
- Obtain explicit consent before taking photographs. This should be recorded on a pre-prepared form, in the officer's pocket notebook or within a victim statement.
- Respect the victim's preferences regarding the location of photography. Avoid requiring attendance at a police station if this could deter cooperation.
- Where possible, respect the victim's preference for the sex of the photographer.

For further information, go to:

- [Victim support and welfare](#)

## Forensic evidence

A clear forensic strategy is essential in domestic abuse investigations to:

- secure evidence
- reduce reliance on victim testimony
- build strong cases for prosecution

Investigators should consider forensic opportunities at the earliest stage and coordinate with specialist teams where necessary. This includes planning for:

- medical examinations
- scene preservation
- digital evidence
- other forms of physical or trace evidence

Every forensic decision should be guided by the need to:

- protect victims
- minimise the risk of re-traumatisation
- ensure the integrity of evidence for court proceedings

When a forensic medical examination is required, an officer or crime scene investigator (CSI) should explain the reason to the victim. The forensic physician is responsible for obtaining consent. Victims should be asked about their preference for the sex of the doctor, although local availability may mean this cannot always be met.

All examinations should use recognised and approved evidence collection kits. Where the unavoidable use of hospital or surgery equipment occurs, a control sample should be taken – for example, a hospital swab – to preserve evidential value. Items such as sheets or blankets should be seized, individually packaged and treated as exhibits.

Where two or more individuals from the same case require examination, separate forensic physicians and different locations should be used wherever possible. If this is not achievable, forensic cleaning and anti-contamination procedures should be applied.

Officers and CSIs should avoid cross-contamination of scenes and should, where possible, avoid attending both the scene and any forensic medical examination. For issues about the [forensic medical examination of children](#), go to the [APP on child abuse](#).

For further information, go to:

- [Medical treatment](#)

Domestic abuse scenes often present forensic challenges because suspects frequently have legitimate access to victims and premises. The forensic strategy should aim to corroborate or challenge each party's account and reconstruct the sequence of events, rather than merely proving presence at the scene.

Investigators and CSIs should jointly plan the forensic approach and consider the following areas of potential evidence.

## Blood or liquid pattern analysis

- Analyse patterns and distribution to reconstruct events (for example, confirming if liquid or paint was thrown).
- Examine blood patterns to assess the position or height of injury and the likely sequence of events.
- Identify signs of attempted clean-up, including stained cloths, tissues or contaminated taps and surfaces.

## Biological evidence

- Recover hair, teeth, skin or fingernail debris where present.
- Consider the presence of bodily fluids, which may verify the victim's account of events.

## Fingerprints

- Record ridge detail accurately, noting exact position and context (for example, on objects used to strike or restrain).
- Consider fingerprints on unusual areas that may indicate the suspect's actions during the assault.

## Clothing and bedding

- Seize damaged or blood-stained clothing and bedding that may corroborate accounts.
- Search areas where items may have been hidden or cleaned, including washing machines and laundry baskets.
- Consider bedding and mattresses for examination in cases involving sexual assault.

## Footwear

- Examine footwear for links to injury patterns, damaged property or debris consistent with the scene.
- Record and recover relevant footwear impressions, both at the scene and on the suspect.

## DNA

- Obtaining DNA from items directly linked to the incident (for example, bottles, cigarettes or other objects used in the assault).

- Even where identity is not in question, DNA evidence can help establish contact, timing and sequence of events.

## Signs of disturbance

- Access the scene for evidence of disturbance, damage or recent repair.
- Record and photograph small details that may corroborate the victim's account, such as:
  - broken locks, furniture or household items
  - pulled telephone cables or damaged walls
  - discarded gifts, personal items or notes
  - relevant items found in household bins (for example, tissues or broken jewellery)

## Injuries and evidence form the forensic examiner

The victim should be regarded as a crime scene in their own right. All injuries and trace evidence should be documented and preserved. Interpretation of injuries should only be made by the forensic physician conducting the examination. Investigators should ensure that:

- bite marks are photographed, swabbed for DNA and referred to a forensic odontologist
- all visible and non-visible injuries are recorded in detail with photographs and body maps

## Weapons

In domestic abuse incidents, everyday household objects are often used as weapons. investigators should:

- identify and seize any item that may have caused injury or been used to threaten the victim
- record configuration of marks, abrasions or bruises that could correspond with seized items
- consider the presence of debris or trace materials that can link the weapon to the victim or scene

For further information, go to:

- [NCA National Injuries Database](#)
- [SafeLives NFS training for professionals](#)

## Tags

APP Domestic abuse