

# Diocese Safeguarding Handbook



## Section 6: Responding to Domestic Abuse

This section contains information on pathways to support services for those affected by domestic abuse.

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***Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility***

## Domestic Abuse and Public Protection

Domestic abuse is an issue for the church and not just the safeguarding team. It is about protection people and ensuring a safe environment for everyone. We need to be in a position to make an appropriate response when domestic abuse is disclosed.

Congregations are made up of people from across the social spectrum. It is therefore statistically probable that abuse is happening in every congregation. Recognising the signs of abuse is therefore crucial to help churches provide an appropriate response and support.

### 6.1 Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is defined by the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, as behaviour by an individual towards their current or ex-partner where a reasonable person would think that the behaviour is likely to cause the victim to suffer physical or psychological harm. The 2021 Act introduced psychological abuse and coercive behaviour as criminal offences.

This includes spouses, civil partners, couples who live together or any other close intimate relationship such as boyfriend and girlfriend. Domestic abuse can include but is not limited to:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control)
- Physical, verbal and/or emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Financial abuse
- Harassment
- Stalking

Offences are gender neutral and can apply to relationships between any two people. People of any gender can be victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.

### Gender-based Violence

Gender-based violence is a term that is used to describe crimes that are overwhelmingly but not exclusively carried out by men against women. Levels of domestic abuse against men have risen steadily for the last 11 years. Some examples of gender-based violence include:

• Rape or other sexual crimes	• Domestic violence
• Stalking	• Forced marriage
• “Honour” crimes	• Sexual harassment
• Female Genital Mutilation	

Crimes may happen in public or private life and it often affects those around the victim such as children and their wider family and friends. Someone who is being abused in a domestic setting is likely to have suffered in silence for many years before telling anyone. Research shows that women are likely to have suffered over 30 incidences of abuse before telling anyone and, are likely to continue to suffer abuse before reporting incidences to the police. Two women each week are killed by current or ex-partners as a result of abuse.

We must ensure that we deal sensitively and supportively with anyone disclosing abuse and remember that they may not take any action following their disclosure.

## **6.2: Busting the Myths**

Most of us have attitudes and prejudices about domestic abuse that are often incorrect, these can include:

### ***It happens to a “certain type of person”***

This is not true. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone regardless of socioeconomic status, religion, cultural background, gender, sexual orientation or personality.

### ***It happens because of.....***

Alcohol, drug misuse, health problems, stress or unemployment..... Again this is incorrect. Domestic abuse happens because an abusive person chooses to behave in a way that will enable them to have power and control over another person. Any other reason used is simply an excuse to justify the behaviour of the abuser.

### ***The victim can make their partner abusive***

Abusers will often tell their victim that “they made them do it”. A victim of abuse is never responsible if their partner chooses to behave in an abusive and/or controlling way.

### ***Domestic abuse is about anger***

Whilst some incidents of violence can be spontaneous and possibly due to anger this is not the case with coercive control – this is a behaviour choice and will happen whether the perpetrator is feeling angry or not. Targeting, forethought and intent are often behind the course of conduct.

### ***Victims should just leave***

If only it was that easy. Victims may leave many times before finally breaking free. Victims of abuse have been undermined and put down over many years and will

often think they can't cope alone; it takes great courage to leave someone who controls all aspects of your life.

Victims are often financially dependant on the abuser and have no resources of their own. It is difficult if there are children and, why should they be up-rooted and change schools when they are not to blame?

Statistically, women are at more risk of being murdered at the point of leaving a violent partner – it is very important that there is a safe place to go.

***Domestic abuse between parents doesn't impact on children***

Children are undoubtedly affected by one parent being abusive to the other. Abusers will frequently undermine the relationship between the child and the other parent as part of their strategy to gain control in the household. Witnessing or hearing abuse between parents is a form of child abuse and can have long-term implications if not dealt with.

***Victims can be fantasists and over dramatic***

Most people living in threatening or controlling situations are reluctant to admit what is happening to them. Reasons can include shame, denial, self-blame, fear of what the abuser could do if they tell anyone. They may also believe the abuser when they are told that they, the victim, drove them to it and quite often, they will believe that the abuse wasn't too bad. The victim will often assume that they won't be believed.

**6.3 Domestic Abuse and the Law**

Abuse now includes violent, physical, sexual, psychological and, financial abuse. The offence carries a maximum of 14 years in prison and includes:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being threatened</li> <li>• Name calling</li> <li>• Controlling what you do, where you go and, who you speak to</li> <li>• Threatening your children</li> <li>• Not being allowed to see family and friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accusing you of cheating</li> <li>• Threatening to out your sexual orientation</li> <li>• Sharing, or threatening to share, intimate images of your with family, friends or work colleagues</li> <li>• Being hit, kicked, punched or have objects thrown at you</li> <li>• Rape, being forced into sexual acts</li> </ul>
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### **Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse**

Also known as “[Clare’s Law](#)”, this scheme allows people to seek information as to whether their partner has a history of offending in relation to domestic abuse. The police decide on whether to disclose information made on a case-by-case basis.

### **The Forensic Medical Services (FMS) Act**

This Act places a statutory duty on health boards to provide forensic medical services for victims of sexual offences. The act also establishes a legal framework for consistent access to “self-referral”, where a victim can access healthcare and request a Forensic Medical Examination (FME) without first having to make a report to the police. A person can request the sex of the examiner involved in their care.

### **Self-referral**

Means that people can refer themselves to the Sexual Assault Response Co-ordination Service (SARCs) without going via a GP or other medical professional.

A SARC can address people’s immediate healthcare needs and, if appropriate an FME to gather forensic evidence which could support a police investigation. Evidence is retained for 26 months. NHS Inform can provide information on how to access self-referral services, or by [www.nhsinform.scot/sarcs](http://www.nhsinform.scot/sarcs)

Further legislation around domestic abuse provides the opportunity for a court or an individual to apply to court, to obtain an interdict with a power of arrest for domestic abuse or for a course of conduct which the court recognises as being domestic abuse. [Scottish Women’s Aid](#) has information about rights including information about how to obtain an interdict and other legal routes to keeping you safe.

## **6.4 The Role of the Church**

We need to be able to respond appropriately and supportively to allegations of domestic abuse recognising that abused women and men find it difficult to tell their story and may approach a friend in the congregation or a rector.

Much as we may want to help someone we also need to recognise when professional help and expertise is needed. Arguably a more important role for us is to walk alongside the victim/survivor on the long road to recovery and there are a number of principles that need to be followed and adhered to:

- Listening – it is very important that the person is listened to without judgement.

- Support -what type of support is the person looking for or needing? Be honest about the level of support that can be given by you and the church. Remember it is very important to know your limits and OK to refer to a more specialist organisation (with the victim's consent) – you can still offer support along the way.
- Trust – victims of domestic abuse are often wary of trusting anyone, be prepared to work hard and be patient when building the relationship, you must work at the victim's pace.
- Confidentiality – it is vitally important that confidentiality is maintained. Information about addresses, children's activities/schools is not shared with anyone regardless of who they claim to be. Always be mindful of who you are sharing information with even within the church – be discrete.
- Contact arrangements – always agree where, when and how to contact the person being abused. Keep a note of what is said including dates and times.
- Ask about any children – are they in danger, are they safe? Domestic abuse could turn into a child protection issue.
- Risk – be aware of the potential risk to you and other members of your church from the perpetrator. You may increase the risk if you try to mediate or counsel people where there is abuse. First and foremost you must keep you and other church members safe from harm.

Remember, if you think someone is in **immediate danger you must call 999**

**If the allegation is against the Rector or other church official you must contact the SEC Safeguarding Co-Ordinator:**

[Safeguarding@scotland.anglican.org](mailto:Safeguarding@scotland.anglican.org)

## 6.5 Directory of Help

This is not a complete list of organisations that can offer help and support. Police Scotland has guidance on domestic abuse which includes how to make a police report, the Disclosure Scheme, partners and other organisations. For non-urgent enquiries please call 101.

**Scottish Women's Aid:** [www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)

**National Domestic Abuse Helpline:** [www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk)

**Respect:** <https://respectphonenumber.org.uk/>  
Telephone: 0808 802 4040

**Scotland's Domestic Abuse & Forced Marriage Helpline:** [www.sdfmh.org.uk](http://www.sdfmh.org.uk)  
Telephone: 0800 027 1234

**Abused Men in Scotland:** <https://abusedmeninscotland.org>  
Telephone: 03300 949 395

**The Male Domestic Abuse Support Service:** 0808 800 0024

**National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline:** [www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse/](http://www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse/)  
Telephone: 0800 999 5428

If you suspect that someone may be in a situation of sexual exploitation please contact:

**Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA):** [www.tarascotland.org.uk](http://www.tarascotland.org.uk)  
Telephone: 0141 276 7724

**The Association of Christian Counsellors** facilitates the provision by Christians of quality counselling and pastoral care. [www.acc-uk.org](http://www.acc-uk.org) 0845 124 9569/9570

**Breathing Space** is a free and confidential phone line service for any individual who is experiencing low mood or depression.

[www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)

**The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOPS)** is part of the UK policing system and is dedicated to eradicating the sexual abuse of children.

[www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk) 0870 000 33 44

**Children 1<sup>ST</sup>** helps to support families under stress, protect children from harm and neglect and help them to recover from abuse.



[www.children1st.org.uk](http://www.children1st.org.uk)

**First Person Plural** is a small UK-wide charity lead by abuse survivors with first-hand experience of complex dissociative distress.

[www.firstpersonplural.org.uk](http://www.firstpersonplural.org.uk)

**Izzy's Promise** based in Dundee offers free and confidential support services to ritual/organised abuse survivors.

[www.izzyspromise.org.uk](http://www.izzyspromise.org.uk)

01382 206 222

**The Lucy Faithfull Foundation** works with adult male and female sexual abusers and young people with inappropriate sexual behaviours, abuse survivors and other family members.

[www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk](http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk)

01527 591 922

**Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACSAS)** is a support group for women and men who have been sexually abused by clergy as children or adults.

[www.macsas.org.uk](http://www.macsas.org.uk)

0808 801 0340

**The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)** provides support and information for people abused in childhood.

[www.napac.org.uk](http://www.napac.org.uk)

0800 085 3330

**One in Four** offers a voice to support for people who have been abused in childhood or experience sexual violence.

[www.oneinfour.org.uk](http://www.oneinfour.org.uk)

0208 697 2112

**Open Secret**, offers safe spaces in the Forth Valley for those aged over 12 who have been affected by abuse.

[www.opensecret.org](http://www.opensecret.org)

01324 630 100

**Safe Space** offers support, counselling, group work and Justice Support to survivors of sexual abuse aged over 12 and living in Fife. They also provide awareness-raising courses.

[www.safe-space.co.uk](http://www.safe-space.co.uk)

01383 739 084

**Survivor Scotland** oversees the National Strategy for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse. Its work is done in a variety of ways, see the website for more information.

[www.suvivorscotland.org.uk](http://www.suvivorscotland.org.uk)

**Victim Support Scotland** is the leading voluntary organization in Scotland helping victims of crime. It provides a wide range of support including emotional support, practical help and essential information for victims, witnesses and others affected by crime.

[www.victimsupportsco.org.uk](http://www.victimsupportsco.org.uk)

0845 603 9213

**Stop it Now** a campaign which aims to prevent child sexual abuse by raising awareness and encouraging early recognition and responses to the problem by the abusers themselves and those close to them.

[www.stopitnow.org.uk](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk)

0808 1000 900