



Domestic Abuse

Briefing Note

What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic Abuse is defined as “**Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality**”.

Domestic abuse can include psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse. Domestic abuse does not necessarily have to be about intimate partners, other family members can be included and much of safeguarding incidents which occur in the home are concerned with domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse is not a new phenomena but has historically focussed upon domestic abuse between younger people or within the family home where its impact on children living at the address is of concern. However, **Domestic abuse has no age barriers**, there are increasing incidents involving elderly couples in households where no children reside. We need to ensure that these cases are dealt with the same level of concern, and the same well established procedures are followed, **regardless of the age of the person at risk**.

Potential Domestic Abuse involving the Elderly: Key Considerations

Risk Factors:

When faced with a potential domestic abuse incident, the following risk factors need to be considered when determining what action to take as these factors **increase the vulnerability** of the individuals concerned.

- **Carer stress** can be a key factor in domestic abuse cases. More and more elderly couples are caring for their spouses on a full time basis over a number of years, which can take its toll on the carers wellbeing and patience. Consider if this could be a factor in the situation you are faced with.
- More and more individuals suffer from **dementia** especially in old age, which can result in them acting and behaving in a way which is unrecognisable to their spouse or partner. They may be experiencing memory loss or displaying behaviours from their past (this may include historical abusive) this can be very difficult for a carer or spouse to accept and come to terms with. Equally, dementia is not an excuse or reason to be an abuser. You still have a responsibility to protect the individual they are abusing regardless of the reasons for the abuse.
- Consider whether either of the individuals has **underlying care and support needs** or health conditions which could be impacting on the situation e.g. Dementia, stroke, diabetes.

Establishing the facts:

When dealing with the elderly it is important to recognise generational perspectives which may influence their view of domestic abuse and their ability/willingness to talk to you about their situation.

- Elderly couples may have been in an abusive relationship for many years or experienced abusive behaviour in the past. Some aspects of the behaviour they may have tolerated or may have been seen to be **socially acceptable**, when they were younger. Do not assume that they are choosing to remain in an abusive situation and therefore do not need any help.
- Elderly people may not **relate to the term ‘domestic abuse’**, you may need to use different language or describe a situation for them to relate to, in order to determine whether they are suffering from domestic abuse.
- Elderly may feel **ashamed** and are less likely to want to ask for help. It is important to build a relationship of trust and reassure them throughout the conversation.

Establishing the Facts:

- If the person is not willing to talk to you, this could be due to your age. They may not feel that someone younger than them will understand the situation that they are in, and may not feel comfortable opening up to someone who is younger than them. **Offer them an alternative.** Is there someone else they could call to talk to? Could a colleague nearer to their own age make contact with them?
- Treat them as you would a younger person. They are no less vulnerable, make sure you **speak to them individually.** Give them opportunity to talk to you away from their spouse/partner.
- **Do not take a situation on face value.** Consider what the individual has told you as well as considering the risk factors highlighted earlier before taking any actions.

Possible Interventions

- If after having considered all of the above, you feel that an individual is at risk of or is being abused and has care and support needs, you **must** make an **adult safeguarding referral** via Family Connect and consider whether a **referral to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)** needs to be made.
- Where the individual is at risk of or is being abused but does **not** have care and support needs, then you should consider a referral to the **MARAC.**
- Where the individual does not engage, **all attempts to support them should be recorded** and the individual told that they can contact services at any time in the future. The risk implications of this decision should be made clear to them.
- However, if risks are high, arrangements should be made for **ongoing monitoring** and where appropriate, proactive contact to ensure needs, risks and rights are fully considered in case of any change in circumstances.

Please remember



**Domestic abuse has no
age barrier**

This is a summary briefing—for further information, please refer to the full Domestic Abuse Guidance within the West Midlands Safeguarding Policy & Procedures available at the following link:-

http://www.telfordsafeguardingadultsboard.org/sab/downloads/download/8/safeguarding_adults_policy_and_procedures