

**West Midlands
Domestic Violence &
Abuse Standards**

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Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People in the West Midlands

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Introduction

These standards reflect the commitment of statutory organisations and specialist domestic abuse services across the West Midlands region (Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton) to address domestic violence and abuse. They provide a framework for these organisations to develop their professional practice, improve services, shape commissioning of future services and deliver the right response across all settings and sectors.

It is recognised that there is a need for a common set of standards which are both ambitious and challenging to drive improvement across the West Midlands region and to ensure consistency of service for anyone who suffers domestic abuse. Some areas may want to develop these standards further and add additional requirements. However, they are the minimum standards for all statutory organisations and specialist domestic abuse services in the West Midlands and should be applied where appropriate and relevant.

These standards have been developed by the West Midlands Domestic Violence Strategic Group which assesses, supports and challenges, where appropriate, the effectiveness and impact of the response to domestic violence across the region. The Group's membership consists of a wide range of statutory, specialist and voluntary organisations, and is about to evolve – particularly to ensure connectivity between DV work and MASHs – into the West Midlands Public Protection Group.

Monitoring and implementation of these standards will be the responsibility of each of the 7 local area partnerships. Decisions on how the standards are monitored at a local area level will remain with those local partnerships. For example, areas may wish to use their Safeguarding Children Boards Section 11 Audits. On a regional basis, the West Midlands Public Protection Group (formerly DV Group) will systematically review progress and implementation of the standards.

Purpose

These standards are intended to identify and promote evidence-based, safe and effective practice in working with adult and child victims of domestic violence and abuse, and to ensure perpetrators are held to account increasingly effectively.

How services are delivered is as important as what is delivered. These standards identify the need for victims, both adults and children, to be listened to and believed; to be treated with dignity and respect. They need services that help them be safe and are accessible and available when they need support. They need a voice so their views on their safety can be taken into account; support to help them and their children recover from the violence; information to be able to make meaningful choices, and protection from further violence.

However and wherever you provide services to domestic violence & abuse victims, these standards can help you self-evaluate your capacity to do this safely, in the right way at the right time.

Definition

Domestic violence & abuse refers to

“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. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional.

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.” (Home Office 2013)

Domestic violence is an abuse of power and control and is characterised by a pattern of abusive controlling behaviour rather than by a one off incident. The definition includes so called ‘honour-based violence’, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

Understanding domestic violence & abuse

Our responses to domestic violence are underpinned by the following understanding:

- Domestic violence and abuse is widespread throughout every socio-economic group and occurs across all neighbourhoods and communities, amongst all ethnicities, gender identities, ages, disabilities, sexualities, immigration statuses, religions or beliefs and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Domestic violence is most commonly gendered, and is caused by the misuse of power and control, is central to effective intervention and prevention. Domestic violence and abuse consists mainly of violence by men and against women, and the gender of both victim and offender influences behaviour and the severity of risk and harm caused.
- Although the vast majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated by men on women, men can be victims of domestic violence and abuse.
- Domestic violence and abuse occurs within lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender (LGBT) communities.
- Domestic violence is intentional behaviour and the responsibility for domestic violence lies with the abuser. The responsibility to end violence lies with the abuser and state institutions.
- There is a strong correlation between domestic violence and child abuse and the presence of one should always trigger enquiry to the other. Outcomes for children affected by domestic violence will rarely be improved without support and empowerment of the abused parent.
- Women who have experienced domestic violence and abuse are significantly more likely to experience depression, anxiety, despair, trauma symptoms, self-harm and suicide and be service users of mental health services. Women who experience domestic violence are 15 times more likely to use alcohol and nine times more likely to use drugs than women that have not been abused.
- Combating domestic violence requires a comprehensive and coordinated inter-agency response. Victims do not experience violence in silos and neither should agencies respond in silos.

- Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour over time, where men tend to be the primary aggressor and where women may be using violence in order to protect and defend themselves and their children. Agencies need to screen effectively to identify the primary aggressor in situations where both women and men are using violence in the relationship or where there are counter allegations.

Domestic violence and children

Each year, tens of thousands of children live in households in the West Midlands where domestic violence occurs. Domestic violence is a hidden crime, and the harm that it causes children and young people equally leaves many children unseen to public services.

Significant evidence reveals that prolonged exposure to domestic violence can have a serious impact upon on children's safety and welfare despite the best efforts of the non-abusing parent to protect them.

All children living with domestic violence

- Will be at greater risk of abuse, serious injury, or death.
- Will be growing up in an atmosphere of fear, tension, intimidation and confusion.
- Will be at higher risk of experiencing depression and trauma
- Will respond individually and will have differing levels of resilience to their experiences and recovery.

Domestic violence perpetrated by a parent is a significant indicator of failed and dangerous parenting by that parent. It will also significantly impact upon the parenting capacity of the victim who will usually be trying to parent and keep the children safe. An imperative of any intervention for children living with domestic abuse is to support the non-abusive parent.

Which services do these standards apply to?

These standards apply to all statutory organisations and specialist domestic abuse services in the West Midlands. The needs arising from domestic violence are wide, diverse and interdependent, including:

- A criminal justice response: protecting the safety of victims and children and controlling abusers
- Legal responses: providing protection; matrimonial, property and financial settlements; making safe arrangements for children; immigration status
- Protecting the safety and needs of children. Right service right time.
- A housing response: providing safe refuge, providing temporary accommodation and securing a safe and permanent home; repairing a home, made unsafe through domestic violence and abuse. Providing added security features
- An informing and supportive response: providing women and child-centred advice and information, helplines, outreach, group work, early identification and signposting
- A health and therapeutic response: dealing with crisis, short and long term physical and mental health consequences and counselling
- A practical response: resettlement, protecting belongings, finding furniture, changing schools, food banks, basic needs, no recourse to public funds
- A financial response: exploring benefit entitlements, accessing grants, budgeting and debt
- An employer's response: providing a safe and supportive working environment for delivering domestic violence services and for supporting staff affected
- A preventative response: public education campaigns, community engagement, educating children and young people, school and youth programmes

Each of these provides a piece of the jigsaw that may be needed to protect the immediate and long term safety and support needs of adult and child victims of domestic violence.

Statement of Principles

Each organisation commits to the following:

- We will prioritise the safety of victims and their children in every aspect of decision making and intervention. We understand that victims and their children are at most risk when they end a violent relationship or seek help and will work to protect them when they do.
- We understand that without effective intervention domestic violence & abuse often escalates in severity. We will make every effort to reach and identify adult and child victims earlier.
- We will treat victims with respect and dignity. We will listen to them and believe their experiences of violence; take seriously their concerns and seek to understand and strengthen their safety strategies.
- We will seek to gain informed consent from victims where possible when there is an intention to share information.
- We will respect confidentiality and privacy wherever possible and understand the increased risks associated with information sharing in the context of domestic violence and abuse.
- We will maximise choices for domestic violence and abuse victims and empower domestic violence and abuse victims to make informed decisions about their lives wherever possible.
- We will actively work to develop competent services which are sensitive to the diverse range and needs of the individuals and communities we serve.
- We will send clear messages that domestic violence perpetrators are accountable for their behaviour and that victims are never to blame.
- We will work co-operatively with the range of services that victims need.
- We will recognise the importance of specialist independent domestic violence and abuse services in providing a voice for victims and children and guiding us on safe practice.

West Midlands Domestic Violence & Abuse Standards

THE FOLLOWING STANDARDS ARE THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENT FOR ANY STATUTORY ORGANISATION OR SPECIALIST DOMESTIC ABUSE AGENCY COMING INTO CONTACT WITH THOSE AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE OR PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE WEST MIDLANDS.

Standard 1:

Organisations address domestic violence & abuse within their policies

Each organisation should have a domestic violence policy which embraces the principles (above) and:

- Defines the range of domestic violence & abuse and include physical, sexual, financial, emotional abuse, controlling behaviour and coercive control as per the domestic abuse definition
- Provides details of the relevant risk assessment and referral pathways
- Provides links across wider policies applicable to the agency such as safeguarding, early help, confidentiality and record management
- Is regularly reviewed

Standard 2:

Organisations have pathways and procedures to respond to domestic violence & abuse

Procedures and pathways will include:

- The need for staff to take a proactive approach in identifying domestic abuse, using professional curiosity and actively asking about domestic abuse where appropriate
- What to do if staff become aware of domestic abuse including understanding and appropriately using relevant DVA risk assessments for adults and children e.g. DASH/BST and making appropriate referrals, including to specialist DVA services and MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)
- Services hold perpetrators accountable and manage their risk
- Where perpetrator programmes are available, perpetrators are given access to programmes to address their behaviour
- Circumstances when proactive, direct or routine enquiries should be undertaken and how staff are prepared and supported to undertake them
- Circumstances when information is shared and how it is shared safely in the context of domestic violence and abuse

- Safe and best practice to support and protect adults and children experiencing domestic violence & abuse
- Systems and processes in place to support the organisation's roles and responsibilities in relation to Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) and the implementation of learning and recommendations from DHRs
- Standards and expectations of supervision arrangements

Standard 3:

Staff are trained, supervised and supported in domestic violence & abuse commensurate with their role

- Training needs are identified in a systematic way
- Training is provided for all staff and volunteers to an appropriate level commensurate with their role. This includes supervisors, managers, human resources staff, decision makers, commissioners, management committee members and political representatives
- Training is provided for those who come into contact with the public in order to identify and signpost victims at the earliest opportunity and those working with potential abusers to screen for domestic violence & abuse
- Training complies with any relevant organisational guidance, such as NICE or the College of Policing and is systematically evaluated for impact
- Training is not held in isolation but reinforced in the workplace through effective supervision and workplace policies and procedures

Standard 4:

Creating safe spaces

The environment where we expect victims to tell us about their experiences needs to be safe, comfortable, informed and supportive.

- Up to date, accessible public information is provided in public spaces and via websites providing clear signposting information
- Signposting and referral mechanisms for those victims that require support from specialist organisations to meet cultural needs and further facilitate safe space
- Conversations are held in a confidential, private space and children are not exposed to disclosures of domestic violence & abuse by adults
- The organisation is prepared for emergencies such as where the perpetrator has followed the victim or where emergency resources may be needed
- A victim can speak to a worker of the same gender
- Professional and confidential interpreting services should be used where needed, ideally having undergone domestic violence & abuse training. Family, friends or children are not used to interpret domestic violence
- The workplace is risk assessed for domestic violence & abuse to protect staff and victims

Standard 5:

Avoiding Unsafe Responses

Agencies avoid unsafe responses to domestic violence & abuse, including:

- Mediation
- Conciliation
- Family therapy
- Child protection conferences or CAFs where both victim and abuser may be invited to attend

Evidence and domestic homicide reviews tell us that in the context of domestic violence, these practices are likely to increase the risk to victims and children because they:

- place victims in an environment where they cannot speak openly for fear of punishment
- collude with the abuser by sharing responsibility for change with the victim

Where the potential for this face to face contact exists, agencies should screen for domestic violence and not provide assessment or intervention services to victims and perpetrators together.

Standard 6:

Responding to Diversity

Agencies will ensure that they are able to respond to diversity and identify any need with particular reference to:

- Age
- Disability
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnerships
- Mental health
- Substance misuse
- Victims with care and support needs
- Victims with complex needs

**Standard 7:
Working with Domestic Violence & Abuse Perpetrators**

Agencies will ensure that domestic abuse perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. With the extension of legislation, greater aspects of domestic violence and abuse will now be a crime and agencies will ensure that criminal justice solutions are the first consideration within a robust offender management framework.

Beyond criminal justice, offender management includes activity to distract, divert, disrupt, apply wider protection through civil action and identify serial perpetrators, each undertaken to protect adult and child victims.

Programmes aimed at working with perpetrators to change their behaviour may form part of an offender management framework. Where perpetrator programmes are delivered in their area, Birmingham, Solihull and Walsall require that programmes should be accreditable by RESPECT, the national membership organisation for work with domestic violence perpetrators[1]. Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton require that programmes in their area incorporate the RESPECT principles below. These requirements provide evidence-based assurance that the service is safe and as effective as possible, without which both adult and child victims may be put at more risk.

RESPECT principles

- To increase the safety of victims, children and others at risk of experiencing domestic violence and abuse
- Provision of parallel support for victims before, during and on completion of the programme
- The perpetrator is 100% responsible for his use of abusive behaviour and the use of such behaviour is a choice
- The content and approach of the work reflects the fact that perpetrators will have to accept sole responsibility for their own actions in order to change their abusive behaviour.
- Provide clients with sufficient hours of contact with staff and over a long enough time period to provide a reasonable opportunity for behaviour change and to sustain a reduction in risk
- Communicate effectively with other professionals to manage risk within a multi-agency context
- The use of violent or abusive behaviour towards a partner, ex-partner or her children is unacceptable. The use of physical force as part of genuine self-defence is different
- The use of violent and abusive behaviour is functional and instrumental

- Workers conduct all work in way that is non-collusive with:
 - i. Abusive behaviour
 - Expectations of power and control over victims
 - Denial and minimisation of abusive behaviour or any justifications for using abusive behaviour including the use of drugs and alcohol
 - ii. The use of culture, race, or faith as a justification for domestic violence
- Interventions which are based solely on anger management will not satisfy the requirements of these standards

**Standard 8:
Multi-Agency Working**

Organisations providing direct services to domestic violence and abuse victims undertake multi-agency working with:

- Clear information sharing guidance and protocols and understand the need for confidentiality to minimise risk and harm from domestic violence and abuse
- Informed consent from victims (where possible) when there is an intention to share information
- Knowledge and engagement with multi-agency screening, multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC), multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) and other relevant local partnerships
- Clear referral pathways to other services which are up to date with availability of services
- Community Safety Partnerships, Children's Safeguarding Boards, Adult's Safeguarding Boards and Health and Wellbeing Boards to develop, promote and ensure take up of appropriate high quality multi-agency domestic violence and abuse training

**Standard 9:
Data Collection**

Agencies providing direct services have systems in place to generate data and information on domestic violence & abuse including:

- Number and nature of reported incidents
- Repeat victims, offenders, MARAC cases
- Anonymised demographic information
- Referral source
- Actions, outcomes and unmet need
- Voice of the victim and the child and their experience of services
- How information is used to improve the victim journey

- Agencies should have a commitment to working towards collecting and sharing a consistent data set, agreeing the definition of repeat victims and giving clarity around what is recorded and how data is interpreted.

Standard 10: Workplace Policy

Agencies should have in place a domestic violence & abuse workplace policy guiding practice which includes:

- Accessible guidance for staff on what to expect from the organisation in terms of protection, support, workplace flexibility and external sources of support
- Accessible guidance for managers and human resources on how best to support and protect employees experiencing domestic violence and their colleagues
- Accessible guidance and mechanisms for dealing with domestic violence abusers
- Applying the Domestic Violence & Abuse Standards within the organisation

Standard 11: Commissioning & Service Design

All agencies take account of these Domestic Violence & Abuse Standards when commissioning, contracting or designing services which may impact upon domestic violence & abuse victims and children to include assessment within:

- Procurement and contracting processes
- Contract and performance management
- Service re-design

Implementation and monitoring

The implementation and monitoring of these standards will consist of the following 3 elements:

- 1) Oversight from the West Midlands Public Protection Group - including deep dives into implementation of specific standards.
- 2) Peer reviews of DVA standards across the West Midlands Region
- 3) External scrutiny as appropriate

Signatories

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner

Chairs of Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategic Partnerships in the seven areas of the West Midlands

Sandwell Women's Aid

Birmingham Women's Aid

On behalf of the West Midlands Preventing Violence against Vulnerable People Board

Local Authority Leaders/Members

Local Authority Chief Executives / Director of Childrens Services

West Midlands Police

NHS

