

1. What is domestic abuse?

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Domestic Abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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. It is not limited to people who live together. Domestic abuse is a crime, including coercive control. Children are also victims if they see, hear, or experience the effects of the abuse.

Anyone can be a victim, but women, including older women, and people with physical disabilities, mental ill health, substance dependence, and/or learning disabilities are at particularly high risk.

2. Disclosures

Every professional should be using 'Routine Safe Enquiry' asking service users about their experience of domestic abuse, regardless of whether there are any signs of abuse, or whether abuse is suspected. Lanyard cards with routine enquiry are available in Bexley to support you. If you receive a positive response to any form of domestic abuse, you **MUST** complete a DASH risk assessment toolkit.

If you have concerns and are unable to safely complete the DASH, please speak to your safeguarding lead or contact Bexley Solace.

Training is available in Bexley for completing a DASH.

10.4 million adults (aged 16+) in England and Wales have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16.

3. What is the DASH

The DASH is a multi-agency tool with a focus on keeping victims and their children safe and ensuring perpetrators are proactively identified and managed. The DASH is pioneering and innovative, turning a reactive 'it's just a domestic' into a proactive 'you must ask' questions approach. Half the questions focus on coercive control and there is a focus on stalking and so-called honour-based abuse because these are the cases where women and children are more likely to be harmed and killed by abusers.

4. ASK

Proactive routine questions about domestic abuse in the course of your work will increase the chances of victims speaking out and accessing help. Bear in mind that many victims may not yet identify their experience as domestic abuse so ask exploratory questions without jargon or assumptions. Ask in private.

Learning Point: Where domestic abuse is thought to be a factor, men also need to be considered as the potential victim.

5. Questions

There are 24 questions within the DASH, these focus on coercive control, historical patterns and current incidents. Current is within the last 3 months. Ask every question as it is listed, do not change the questions. The DASH questions can start the conversation and expand on the victim's experience.

The DASH must be asked in private, do not rush - victim's may never have disclosed before so it may be traumatic.

The DASH will highlight 15 high risk factors in domestic abuse – once identified you must then complete safety planning.

7. Support

Offer support there and then to call for specialist help - if the victim is safe right now and with you, this is a good opportunity to get specialist help. Do not wait to refer until after they has gone. By then, the opportunity for them to get specialist support may be missed. Ask what the victim wants and what the barriers are to safety in their view.

For support on risk assessment and safety planning contact Solace on 020 3198 4659.

One Stop Shop every Wednesday 12.30 -3pm at Central Library Bexleyheath.

Referral to MARAC@bexley.gov.uk

6. Professional Judgement

There is 3 criteria to refer to the MARAC. Visible high risk which is a 'yes' response to 14 or more of the DASH questions, escalation or professional judgement. Every professional can use this to refer to MARAC – examples include stalking, sexual abuse, extreme fear. If you have concerns regarding the situation.

Learning Point: You cannot manage risk until you have completed a DASH risk assessment. Safety planning must be done in conjunction with the DASH.

For further information about domestic abuse services in Bexley please visit

www.bexleydomesticabuseservices.org or visit www.gov.uk or www.safelives.org.uk