

GP and Practice Staff Guidance on Responding to Domestic Violence / Abuse



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Produced by the Safeguarding Children Team

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If you are worried that a child, young person or adult is at risk of abuse, harm or neglect call Suffolk Customer First on 0808 800 4005.

Always dial 999 when life is threatened, people are injured, a crime is in progress or an immediate Police response is necessary.

1. Introduction

This document provides guidance to general practices in Suffolk to help them respond effectively to patients experiencing domestic abuse. The revised definition of domestic violence and abuse has been adopted in Suffolk and states:

“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.

The Government definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so-called ‘honour’ based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group¹.

This guidance includes key principles to help you develop your practice domestic abuse policy².

2. The Role of Practice Management

A senior person within the practice should be identified to clarify the practice’s response to domestic abuse by:

- Noting what **existing domestic violence services** are available (a list of national organisations is in section 4 of this guidance document).
- **Engaging** with local domestic abuse services.
- Being aware that DV training is included in the GP Safeguarding Leads Events and in the Level 3 training offered to all practices.
- Noting the **care pathway** below.

3. Establishing a Domestic Abuse Care Pathway

The Primary Healthcare Team's Role

- Recognise patients whose symptoms mean they might be more likely to be experiencing domestic abuse.
- Enquire sensitively and provide a safe and empathetic first response.
- Understand the practice's process for responding to disclosure, and know what to do when there is immediate risk of harm to patients and their children.
- Know who the GP Safeguarding Lead is for their practice and seek their advice as required.
- Document domestic abuse within patient records safely and keep records for evidence purposes. Use recommended codes (see Appendix of this guidance).
- Share information appropriately³. Information will be shared **only with the consent** of the patient, subject to practice policy on safeguarding children and young people⁴ and safeguarding adults. In exceptional circumstances information may be shared without the patient's consent. Some cases considered at Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference⁵ (MARAC) are likely to constitute exceptional circumstances because the MARAC discusses the most serious cases of alleged or suspected domestic abuse.

The Primary Care Clinician's Role

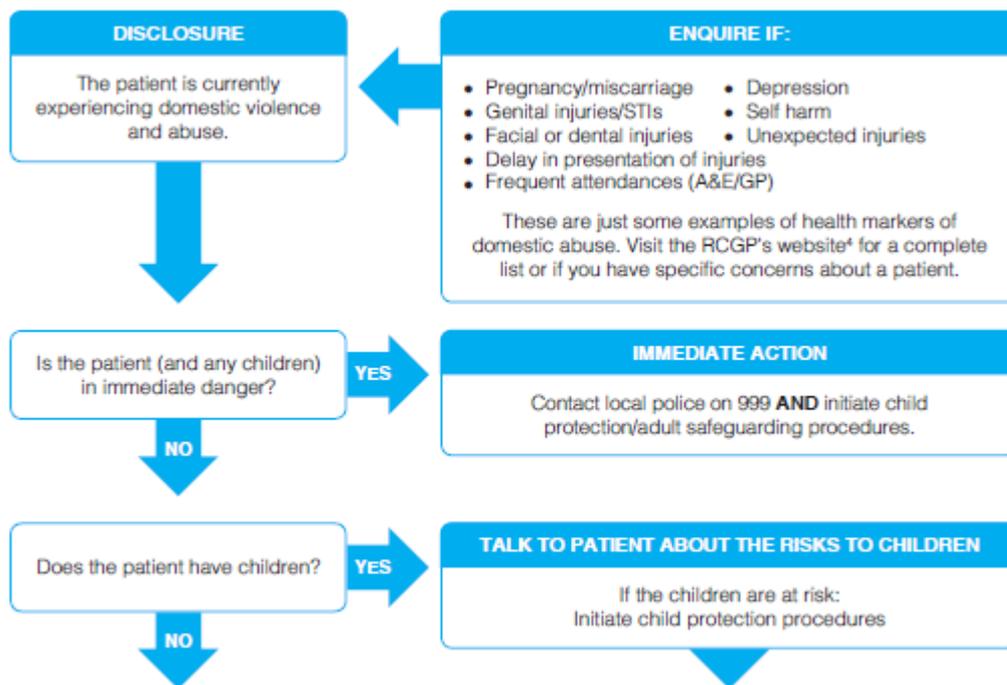
When undertaking an initial assessment of the patient, the clinician will be helped to identify domestic abuse by:

- Completing a ['DASH' Risk Checklist](#).
- Advising the patient about the services available according to the risk level. This may result in:
 - Referral to an appropriate local specialist domestic abuse service, if the patient consents.
 - Signposting to domestic abuse resources and provision of a basic safety plan if the patient is unwilling to engage with services at this time.

'A safety plan is a way of helping the individual to protect themselves and their children. It helps them to plan in advance for the possibility of future violence and abuse and helps them to think about how they can increase their safety either within the relationship, or if/when they decide to leave' (Women's Aid Survivors Handbook ['How to make a safety plan'](#) 2015).
- Ensuring that child protection **and** adult safeguarding procedures are initiated where required, especially where there is immediate risk of harm.

**If you are worried that a child, young person or adult is at risk of abuse, harm or neglect
call Customer First on 0808 800 4005 or 999 in an emergency.**

Resource: process for responding to domestic abuse (SafeLives⁹ and IRIS 2014)



Respond

Offer the patient an appointment with the practice Safeguarding Lead for an initial assessment, who will assess risk and advise and refer appropriately.

In this practice the Safeguarding Lead is:

Telephone:

If the Safeguarding Lead is unavailable, their Deputy is:

Telephone:

Record

- Consent to share information (or not) and ensure information is shared appropriately.
- Explain the need to document domestic abuse and document any injuries for purposes of evidence.
- Use code 13VF 'at risk of violence in the home' in patient notes to indicate a disclosure of DV – indicate the risk level if known.
- Ensure patient is seen alone at future appointments.
- Liaise with the practice Safeguarding Lead.
- **If patient is assessed as high risk liaise with the Suffolk MARAC Coordinator: 01473 782752.**

4. Training Requirements for the Practice Team

The whole GP practice team – clinical and non-clinical – should be trained in how to recognise the signs of domestic abuse, how to enquire sensitively and safely, the importance of confidentiality and the practice's process for responding to disclosure, which is included in the Level 3 training offered.

An e-learning package is available at the RCGP online learning site [here](#).

A face-to-face training programme is currently under development by Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk CCG and Ipswich and East Suffolk CCG and Suffolk Constabulary. Look out for initial pilot sessions are being delivered at the Safeguarding Lead Events in the West and Ipswich and the East.

Domestic abuse training content should cover:

- **Health markers** of domestic abuse. For example, when patients present with depression, anxiety, tiredness, chronic pain or non-specific symptoms.
- How to '**ask the question**' sensitively and safely.
- The implications of domestic abuse for both **child protection and adult safeguarding**.
- How to respond in cases of **immediate and significant risk** (i.e. where it may not be safe to go home).
- How to document domestic abuse and manage **patient notes** safely.
- The protocols of **information sharing**³, **consent and confidentiality**⁶.
- Local domestic abuse **response pathways** for all levels of **risk**.
- The practice's process for responding to disclosure of domestic abuse. A one page flow chart can be useful – an example is on page 4 of this guidance.
- What to do when a **perpetrator** discloses or is also registered with the GP.

5. Organisations that Offer Support

If you are worried that a child, young person or adult is at risk of abuse, harm or neglect call Suffolk Customer First on 0808 800 4005.

Always dial 999 when life is threatened, people are injured, a crime is in progress or an immediate Police response is necessary.

Local Organisation	Service Offered	Contact Details
Suffolk Constabulary	Suffolk Police are committed to supporting domestic abuse victims.	Dial 101 and ask to speak to a member of the Domestic Abuse Team Web: www.suffolk.police.uk/safetyadvice/domesticabuse.aspx
Lighthouse (formerly Ipswich Women's Aid)	Women's refuge accommodation, counselling support and community services.	For more information call: 01473 745111
Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre	Women's refuge accommodation, counselling support and community services.	For more information call: 01284 753085
Liberty Women's Refuge (Waveney)	Women's refuge accommodation, counselling support and community services.	For more information call: 0845 4671420
Suffolk Domestic Abuse Outreach Service	Crisis Support, Intensive Support, Advice and Guidance and Specialist Male Victim Support.	Helpline: 0800 977 5690 <i>24 hour helpline for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse</i> Web: www.angliacaretrust.org.uk/index.php/services/community-safety-projects
Compassion	Support for those who have experienced domestic abuse in south Suffolk / Babergh.	For more information call: 07597 337831. Web: www.compass-ion.org/
Suffolk Rape Crisis Centre	Confidential telephone counselling, support and information service.	Helpline: 0800 0850 520 <i>Tuesday and Thursday evenings 19:00 – 21:00</i> Web: www.suffolkrapecrisis.org.uk
The Ferns Sexual Assault Referral Centre	A Sexual Assault Referral Centre provides a one-stop location, offering medical care and emotional support to any victim of sexual assault.	Call: 0300 123 5058 Web: www.theferns-suffolk.org.uk
PHOEBE	Specialist service for BME woman and children (Ipswich).	For more information call: 01473 231566. Web: www.phoebecentre.org.uk
Suffolk Refugee Support	Advice and support for asylum seekers and refugees in Suffolk.	For more information call: 01473 400785. Web: www.suffolkrefugee.org.uk
Suffolk MARAC Coordinator	Coordination of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference.	The MARAC Coordinator is happy to take calls to discuss and give advice / guidance on 01473 782752. Web: www.suffolkmarac.onesuffolk.net
Suffolk IDVA Contacts	Independent Domestic Violence Advisor Service	To refer, please call: 01473 228 280

National Organisations

Organisation	Service Offered	Contact Details
24-Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline	A service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf. It is run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge. Callers may first of all hear an answerphone message before speaking to a person.	T: 0808 2000 247 <i>24 hour helpline. Translation facilities for callers whose first language is not English, and a service for callers who are deaf or hard of hearing are available.</i> Web: www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk
Men's Advice Line	A confidential helpline for men experiencing domestic violence by a current or ex-partner. This includes all men – in heterosexual or same-sex relationships. Offers emotional support, practical advice and information on a wide range of services for further help and support.	T: 0808 801 0327 <i>Days and times of phone support vary.</i> Web: www.mensadvice.org.uk/mens_advice.php
Broken Rainbow	National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans* (LGBT) domestic violence helpline provides confidential support to all members of the LGBT communities, their family, friends, and agencies supporting them.	T: 0800 999 5428 <i>Days and times of phone support vary. *Trans specific service on Tuesday afternoons 13:00 – 17:00.</i> Web: www.brokenrainbow.org.uk/
Karma Nirvana	Supporting victims of honour crimes and forced marriages.	T: 0800 5999247 Web: www.karmanirvana.org.uk
Respect Phone line	A confidential helpline for people who are abusive and/or violent towards their partners. Offers information and advice to support perpetrators to stop their violence and change their abusive behaviours. The main focus is to increase the safety of those experiencing domestic violence.	T: 0808 802 4040 <i>Days and times of phone support vary.</i> Web: www.respectphoneline.org.uk

Clare's Law

From March 2014 people with concerns about their partner's history are able to request background information from Suffolk police under [Clare's Law](#). The aim of this scheme is to give people formal mechanism to make inquiries about their partner if they are worried that they may have been abusive in the past. An application can only be made by contacting the police.

This can be done by phoning 101 the non-emergency number, or by visiting a police station.

6. References

1. Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Partnership Strategy for Suffolk 2015-2018. Suffolk County Council Suffolk Domestic Abuse Partnership.
2. Definition of domestic abuse. Home Office. Available at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/domestic-violence
3. Information sharing: advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers. HM Government. 2015. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419628/Information_sharing_advice_safeguarding_practitioners.pdf

'Striking the Balance': Practical Guidance on the application of Caldicott Guardian Principles to Domestic Violence and MARACs (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences). Department of Health. 2012. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/215064/dh_133594.pdf
4. West Suffolk CCG and Ipswich and East Suffolk CCG Safeguarding Children & Young People GP and Practice Staff Resource Pack. Available at: www.ipswichandeastsuffolkccg.nhs.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=65qrJ4a9WqE%3d&portalid=1
5. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) – where information is shared and a coordinated safety plan implemented to protect the highest risk victims of domestic abuse. General information available at: www.safelives.org.uk/aboutus/faqs.html and local information available at: <http://www.suffolkmarac.onesuffolk.net/>
6. 'Confidentiality'. General Medical Council. 2009. Available at: http://www.gmc-uk.org/Confidentiality_English_0415.pdf_48902982.pdf and 'Consent: patients and doctors making decisions together'. 2008. Available at: http://www.gmc-uk.org/Consent_English_0415.pdf_48903482.pdf
7. Domestic violence: the general practitioner's role. RCGP. Available at: www.rcgp.org.uk/policy/rcgp-policy-areas/~media/Files/Policy/A-Z-policy/Domestic-violence.ashx and additional guidance on domestic violence in families with children: www.rcgp.org.uk/policy/rcgp-policy-areas/~media/Files/Policy/A-Z-policy/Domestic%20Violence%20in%20families%20with%20children.ashx
8. Safeguarding Children Toolkit for General Practice. The Royal College of General Practice / NSPCC. 2014. Available at: www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/clinical-resources/~media/Files/CIRC/Safeguarding-Children-Toolkit-2014/RCGP-NSPCC-Safeguarding-Children-Toolkit.ashx
9. SafeLives Charity (previously CAADA; Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) <http://www.safelives.org.uk/>
10. Suffolk LSCB 'Guidance for Dealing with Domestic Violence and Incidents of Domestic Abuse Where Children Are Members of the Household'. Available at: <http://suffolkscb.org.uk/assets/files/2014/Jan-2012-SSCB-DV-Guidance.pdf> and guidance on the SafeLives DASH Risk Identification Checklist: <http://suffolkscb.org.uk/assets/files/2015/LSCB-SafeLives-guide.pdf>

11. Appendix: Recommended Codes Relating to Domestic Abuse

For victims: At risk of violence in the home - 13VF / 13VF

For perpetrators: History of domestic violence - 14X3 (XaJhe3)

Alleged perpetrator of domestic violence - 14XC

Subject of MARAC -13Hm

From the RCGP/NSPCC 'Safeguarding Children Toolkit for General Practice' 2014; **Tool 3: Recommended Codes**. Available at:

www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/clinical-resources/~/_media/Files/CIRC/Safeguarding-Children-Toolkit-2014/RCGP-NSPCC-Safeguarding-Children-Toolkit.ashx