

Guidelines for Working with Men Perpetrating Domestic Violence

These guidelines were developed by the Westminster Domestic Violence Forum with help from DVIP and Respect.

Most interventions to date have focused on work with the female victim / survivor. This has left her as the key person responsible for change. Since 2000 the London Domestic Violence Forum has put the emphasis on holding the abuser accountable, and Westminster Domestic Violence Forum (WDVF) supports this approach.

This guide is for working with male perpetrators who are abusive to female partners.

WDVF recognises that women may occasionally abuse men in relationships, and that domestic violence sometimes takes place in gay or lesbian relationships. However these guidelines are about holding male perpetrators of violence against women accountable as this is the majority of domestic violence.

The Phoenix Group is a Westminster group of women survivors of domestic violence. All the women have children. They are from a range of cultural backgrounds. The aim of this group is to advise the work of the Westminster Domestic Violence Forum (WDVF). Many of these women have seen ex-partners move onto other relationships in which they are also abusive. The Group recommended that WDVF work to hold male perpetrators accountable as a step towards prevention of domestic violence.

The group raised the following pointers for work with male perpetrators -

- Build some working relationships with the man, so you can ask directly about domestic violence. Put it in a social context, don't say "I hear you do this" because this could make it unsafe for the woman and children.
 - Be cautious, stay in close with the woman and help her look at risk factors.
 - Look for signs of his power and control.
 - Build the woman's confidence alongside the work with the man.
 - Be flexible – and let the man do the talking so you that you can see what his beliefs are.
 - Don't take the man at face value – e.g. they can be very lying and manipulative
 - It is important to do close work together – have a worker with the woman, and a worker with the man.
- Working with these men to change their behaviour is a key step towards eradicating domestic violence.

Ensure that safety of women and children is the primary goal of all work with male perpetrators – 'Respect' Statement of Principles and Minimum Standards of Practice (2004)

The work of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota has identified power and control as the main factor in male violence towards women. The Duluth 'Power and Control' and 'Equality' wheels demonstrate that violence is learnt behaviour and is not inherent. So it can be unlearned and behaviour changed. (See WDVF Guidelines for Good Practice)

You may encounter perpetrators of domestic violence as direct service users or through women or children whom you know or suspect to be affected by domestic abuse. The approach you

take will depend on whether a man is directly acknowledging his domestic abuse as a problem, is seeking help for a related problem or has been identified by others as abusive.

These guidelines are intended for frontline workers who encounter domestic abuse in the course of their work. The form of engagement suggested is not intended as an alternative to the provision of specialist services for abusing men.

We suggest the following approach:

- 1. Look/listen**
- 2. Ask**
- 3. Assess risk**
- 4. Respond**
- 5. Refer**
- 6. Record**

1. Look/listen

Abusive men as service users

Some men may identify their abusive behaviour directly and ask for help to deal with their violence. This is likely to have been prompted by a crisis such as a particularly bad assault, an arrest or ultimatum from the abused partner. Such men – even though they have come voluntarily – are unlikely to admit responsibility for the seriousness or extent of the abuse, and may try to “explain” the abuse or blame other people or factors. Even those who are concerned enough about the abuse to approach an agency may present with other related problems such as alcohol, stress or depression, and may not refer directly to the abuse.

Some men may say they are victims of their (female) partner’s violence. While any such allegations must be treated seriously, research indicates that a significant number of male victims are also likely to be perpetrators of domestic abuse.

WDVF recommends that engaging men about their abusive behaviour in order to refer them to specialist services should not take place as part of any form of ‘couples’ or ‘joint family’ work. The model is about holding the men accountable for their abusive behaviour, so involves direct work with him.

See page 8 & 9 for indicators of abuse and heightened risk.

Abusive men as partners of service users

You may encounter men who insist on accompanying their partners to appointments or who want to talk for their partners. You may have service users whom you know to be abusive because their partners are also your service users and they have told you about it. These men may appear to you to be caring and protective of their partners and very plausible.

Directly engaging with an abusive man who is not your service user may be difficult; given the normal standards of service user confidentiality and the overriding need to avoid any intervention that might increase risk to the woman. However, being aware of indicators of violence is important for your dealings with the man.

See page 8 & 9 for indicators of abuse and heightened risk.

Abusing men as fathers of young service users

There are clear links between domestic violence and child abuse and there is much evidence about the detrimental effects on children of witnessing domestic abuse. In your role you may know children affected by domestic abuse, and consequently the abuser. You may be in contact with him in your agency, in his home or at child protection case conferences, for example. If the issue of the man's violence has been openly stated as a cause of a child's problem - for example as the reason for a child being on the child protection register – it may be appropriate and necessary to speak to him directly about his abusive behaviour. You should in any case be guided by child protection procedures.

See page 8 & 9 for indicators of abuse and heightened risk.

2. Ask

Your response to any disclosure, however indirect, could be significant for encouraging responsibility and motivating a man towards change.

If the man presents with a problem such as drinking, stress or depression, for example, but does not refer to his abusive behaviour, these are useful questions to ask:

"How is this drinking/stress at work/depression affecting how you are with your family?"

"When you feel like that what do you do?"

"When you feel like that, how do you behave?"

"Do you find yourself shouting/smashing things.....?"

"Do you ever feel violent towards a particular person?"

"It sounds like you want to make some changes for your benefit and for your partner/children. What choices do you have? What can you do about it? What help would you like to assist you to make these changes?"

If the man has stated that domestic abuse is an issue, these are useful questions to ask:

"It sounds like your behaviour can be frightening; does your partner say she is frightened of you?"

"How are the children affected?"

"Have the police ever been called to the house because of your behaviour?"

"Are you aware of any patterns – is the abuse getting worse or more frequent?"

"How do you think alcohol or drugs affect your behaviour?"

"What worries you most about your behaviour?"

If a man responds openly to these prompting questions, more direct questions relating to heightened risk factors may be appropriate:

"Do you feel unhappy about your partner seeing friends or family - do you ever try to stop her?"

"Have you assaulted your partner in front of the children?"

"Have you ever assaulted or threatened your partner with a knife or other weapon?"

"Did/has your behaviour changed towards your partner during pregnancy?"

The information you gather will be the basis for your decision about how best to engage and what kind of specialist help is required - either for the man or to manage risk.

3. Assess risk

It is important to assess risk before deciding what to do next.

Although risk assessment is primarily informed by the woman's experience and insights (see WDFV Guidelines for Good Practice on safety planning), there may be other factors which you identify through your contact with or knowledge of the perpetrator. See page 9 for a risk assessment checklist. Research shows that these are significant indicators of heightened risk. You should consider these in deciding whether to undertake multi-agency consultation or risk management measures, together with agencies such as children and families social work, police or other agencies. Some of these risk factors are static and some may be subject to change. Risk awareness should be a continuous process and risk assessments should be regularly reviewed.

4. Respond

Domestic abuse is a serious issue and all agency staff involved have a role in providing good responses, which hold perpetrators responsible. Your response to the man and any disclosures could affect the extent to which he accepts responsibility for his behaviour and, therefore, for the need to change. You can say things to a perpetrator that make a difference and you can influence the situation.

In any dealings with perpetrators you should adopt the following good practice response. This is not a 'cure' or a 'treatment' but principles to observe within your own work context, which are both safe and constructive.

Good Practice in Dealing with Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

- Be clear that abuse is always unacceptable
- Be clear that abusive behaviour is a choice
- Affirm any accountability shown by the man
- Be respectful and empathic but do not collude
- Be positive, men can change
- Do not allow your feelings about the man's behaviour to interfere with your provision of a supportive service
- Be straight-forward; avoid jargon
- Be clear that you might have to speak to other agencies and that there is no entitlement to confidentiality if children are at physical or emotional risk
- Whatever he says, be aware that, on some level he is unhappy about his behaviour
- Be aware, and tell the man, that children are always affected by living with domestic abuse, whether or not they witness it directly
- Be aware, and convey to the man, that domestic abuse is about a range of behaviours, not just physical violence (see definition)
- Do not back him into a corner or expect an early full and honest disclosure about the extent of the abuse;
- Be aware of the barriers to him acknowledging his abuse and seeking help (such as shame, fear of child protection process, self-justifying anger)
- Be aware of the likely costs to the man himself of continued abuse and assist him to see these
- If you are in contact with both partners, always try to see them separately if you are discussing abuse.

Safety Planning with Male Perpetrator

If, and only if, the man has responded to your questions in a way which suggests that he is worried about his behaviour, and is ready to take responsibility for his need to change, it **may** be appropriate to start to discuss plans for keeping his partner safe from his abusive behaviour. Ask questions such as:

- "What kind of situations do you get worked up about?"
- "What are the physical sensations you can note when you are getting wound up?"
- "What are the feelings you have or the thoughts that come into your head during these times?"
- "What would your partner recognise in you at these times?"

Encourage the man to think about how he could use this knowledge about early signals to keep his partner or children safe in the future. It may be appropriate to discuss a 'time-out' plan with him for use when the warning signals are present, and he feels that he is becoming risky to her. This involves a man deciding, in advance, to remove himself from the high-risk situation for a time-limited period in order to keep his partner safe. If you discuss such 'time-out' strategies with him there are points you must emphasise:

- Time-out should only be used as an emergency measure to keep her safe; not to avoid hearing criticism
- He should discuss the plan with his partner in advance so that she knows its purpose and exactly what he will do
- He must decide (and she should know) how long he will leave for (usually one hour) and where he will go
- He must not drink and shouldn't drive during the time-out
- He must not use time-out to rehearse and strengthen his own arguments nor put her under further threat or fear of his intentions.
- He should telephone at the end of the period to check if she feels safe and negotiate his return

WARNING

We know that men who abuse their partners can misuse the idea of 'time-out' to avoid arguments or to provide an excuse to leave a situation which they find uncomfortable and thereby to further disempower their partner. There is also a risk that using time-out might encourage men to see the problem simply as one of temper control. Before introducing the concept of time-out with a man you must judge the extent to which he is taking responsibility for the risk which he represents and about his likely level of commitment to keeping to any 'rules' which he may set himself.

At best, time-out is a short-term safety measure; it does nothing to address the attitudes and expectations which underpin men's abuse.

Safety issues

If you are working with a male perpetrator in any on-going way, it is crucial to have a colleague working with the woman in order to ensure her and the children's (if she has

them) safety. Any agency working with male perpetrators without this associated safety work with the woman will be putting them at risk.

'Respect' Statement of Principles and Minimum Standards of Practice (2004)

- **If you are the woman's main support, he will probably see you as a threat.** Be mindful of this in any contact with either partner
- If you are in contact with both partners, always try to see them separately when discussing violence and abuse
- If your information about the man's violence comes only from the woman, **you cannot use that to challenge the man. Her safety is paramount**
- Do not attempt 'couple work' as this is likely to be ineffective or dangerous
- Be especially careful if he is under the influence of alcohol or other substances and do not engage with him about his violence at such times.

Looking after yourself -

Don't work on your own – maintain links with other colleagues / agencies and keep using support to think your responses through.

Make plans that ensure your safety – e.g. don't ever visit a man suspected of domestic violence to talk with him about the behaviour on your own.

Use supervision for emotional support and planning.

Ensure that you have sufficient training for this work.

5. Refer

Research shows that the most effective way to alter men's abusive behaviour is to attend a structured male perpetrator programme, where men attend a weekly group which includes education, as well as challenging behaviours and beliefs about gender and relationships in order to change their behaviour.

Do not refer these men to anger management courses.

Specialist Services for Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

The primary role of specialist services for perpetrators is to confront and tackle the violence.

The Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP) is an established project working with men who are referred or self-refer to their perpetrators programme. Al-Aman is a service for Arabic speaking men, provided through DVIP.

When men are convicted of domestic violence offences they may be referred to a Probation Service male perpetrators programme, depending on the severity of the offence and their suitability for this kind of intervention.

The national Respect Phoneline (0845 122 8609) offers a clear, non-collusive response to men concerned about their abusive behaviour and advice on short-term strategies to prevent further abuse (see page 10).

Generic Services

It may be possible to refer a man to a generic service for associated needs. **The primary role of such a service is not to address the violence. If you are considering this approach, then also look to make a referral to a perpetrator programme at the same time.**

While alcohol/substance use is neither an excuse nor a cause of domestic abuse there are links and, for some abusive men, it is appropriate to refer to alcohol/drug services and this may reduce his risk of using violence.

If you suspect that a man is suffering from a mental health problem it may be useful to refer him to primary care mental health services.

Some abusive men you encounter will have issues relating to past traumatic experiences and might benefit from a referral to a general counselling/psychotherapy service. However there is a risk that focusing on such issues may allow the man to avoid responsibility for his current behaviour and attitudes - especially if such a service is provided in the absence of a specialist domestic abuse perpetrator programme. You should be aware of this in making any referral and should, in any case, continue your involvement with the man in line with the good practice approach outlined above.

Multi-agency response

The purpose of attempting to engage with an abusive man is not only about assisting him to change his attitudes and behaviour, but to ensure that his behaviour and his responsibility for it, are at the centre of a multi-agency response. Some men will not change even if they have the opportunity to attend a perpetrator programme.

Communication with other agencies involved with a family is important and, when children are involved, essential. If a man refuses to engage, or does not change his abusive behaviour, the response of other agencies involved with that family may need to change in response to this. For example, risk management measures may need to be put in place or changes made to safety plans for the woman.

6. Record

It is important to keep detailed records if a man discloses abusive behaviour. This is important information which will enable continuity of care. Good records may also help in any future legal proceedings which the woman or the police/Crown Prosecution Service may take.

Record the information and file in his case notes. Remember that such records are strictly confidential. However, if an individual, especially a child may be at risk of significant harm, this will override any requirement to keep information confidential. You should explain this to the man.

Checklist: Indicators of Domestic Abuse

A man who is worried about his abusive behaviour may present in the following ways:

- *I've got a problem with drink*
- *I need anger management*
- *I'm not handling stress at work*
- *My wife says I need to see you*
- *My wife and I are fighting a lot*
- *My wife and I need counselling*
- *My wife is not coping and taking it out on me*
- *The kids are out of control and she's not firm enough*
- *I'm depressed/anxious/stressed/not sleeping/not coping/not myself*
- *I feel suicidal (or have threatened or attempted suicide)*
- *I'm worried about my rage at work, in the car, in the street, at the football.*

Additional behaviours/indicators to be aware of:

- Attempts to accompany or speak for women partners
- Sexual jealousy or possessiveness
- Recent mental ill-health relating to violence
- Substance use/dependence
- Excessive telephoning or texting
- Checking on her whereabouts

Although rare, a man might present with a physical injury such as a hand injury caused by punching, or you might notice injuries caused by the woman defending herself such as scratch marks.

Checklist: Risk Assessment

- Recent or imminent separation
- Past assault of family members
- Past assault of strangers or acquaintances
- Past breach or ignoring of injunctions, court orders or conditions
- Victim and/or witness of “family” violence as child or adolescent
- Substance misuse
- Recent mental ill-health relating to violence
- Past physical assault of partner
- Partner pregnant or recently given birth
- Sexual assault or sexual jealousy
- Past use of weapons or threats of death
- Recent escalation in frequency or severity of assaults
- Extreme minimisation or denial of domestic violence history
- Attitudes that support or condone domestic abuse

Adapted from the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Guide, British Columbia Institute Against Family Violence, 1995

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Phoneline

The Respect Phoneline 0845 122 8609 welcomes calls from frontline workers coming into contact directly or indirectly with perpetrators of domestic violence or people that they suspect may be perpetrating domestic violence. The Respect Phoneline is funded by the Home Office and is available for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Opening hours

The Respect Phoneline 0845 122 8609 is open:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm

You can leave a message when the lines are closed or busy and we'll try to get back to you as soon as we can. You can also email us with your enquiry:

info@respectphoneline.org.uk or visit: www.respectphoneline.org.uk

Textphone users dial 18001 0845 122 8609

Language Line service available.

The vast majority of calls we get are from male perpetrators of domestic violence in heterosexual relationships. However, we occasionally receive calls from female perpetrators and from perpetrators in same-sex relationships.

Information and advice to frontline workers

The Respect Phoneline offers information and advice to frontline workers about working with perpetrators such as:

- Talking about how perpetrators of domestic violence may manipulate statutory or voluntary sector workers in order to exercise power and control over their partners
- Offering advice on best practice, explaining which interventions are safe and most effective
- Explaining which interventions aren't appropriate such as anger management courses, mediation and couples counselling
- Listening to your concerns about working with a client
- Providing contact details for local domestic violence perpetrator programmes
- Providing contact details of trainers and consultants specific to perpetrator interventions
- Providing information about the content and structure of domestic violence perpetrator programmes

Perpetrators of domestic violence

The Respect Phoneline provides the following to perpetrators of domestic violence:

- Contact details about local domestic violence perpetrator programmes
- Clear, unequivocal messages about domestic violence
- Encouragement and motivation to get help and to stop their abusive behaviours

We:

- Discuss their abusive behaviours focusing on the processes that led to the abuse and exploring non-abusive alternatives
- Explain that they have choices and are 100% responsible for their behaviour

- Try to increase their empathy towards their partner (and children) who has suffered the abuse
- Send them an information pack designed to enhance their understanding of domestic violence and motivate them to access specialist help

We do not undertake long-term phone work or counselling

Partners and ex-partners, friends and relatives:

The Respect Phoneline also welcome calls from partners and ex-partners of perpetrators, friends and relatives. We:

- Signpost them to the national domestic violence helplines
- Explain how perpetrator programmes work, what's involved, what's best practice and how they are different from anger management courses
- Encourage them to have realistic expectations about the likelihood of perpetrators changing their behaviour