

Appropriate Language: Domestic Abuse

Guidance for Professionals

How to Use This Document

This document can be used by professionals when discussing domestic abuse, including when escalating intelligence and delivering training. It should be referred to when speaking with victims, family members (including children of victims) and perpetrators of domestic abuse. It should also be applied in multi-agency meetings and other settings where professionals are discussing individuals who are, have been, or at risk of being a victim of domestic abuse.

About Appropriate Language in Relation to Domestic Abuse

It is imperative that appropriate terminology is used when discussing individuals' people who have experienced, are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing domestic abuse. Language implying that the victims is complicit in any way, or responsible for the crimes that have happened or may happen to them, must be avoided.

Language should reflect the presence of coercion and the lack of control many victims experience in domestic abuse situations and must recognise the severity of the impact that abuse has on the individual and their children. Victim-blaming language may reinforce messages from perpetrators around shame and guilt. This in turn may prevent the victim from disclosing their abuse, through fear of being blamed by professionals. When victim-blaming language is used amongst professionals, there is a risk of normalising and minimising the victim's experience, resulting in a lack of appropriate response.

Guidance for Using Appropriate Language

The following table outlines terms that should not be used when discussing or recording issues of domestic abuse and includes a list of appropriate alternative phrases.

A list of commonly used acronyms within the domestic abuse agenda can be found under Appendix 1.

Inappropriate Term / Phrases / Sentence	Suggested Alternative
<i>'Victim', 'Survivor', 'Perpetrator'</i> The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' can be demeaning to persons who have been victims of domestic abuse. The word 'victim' is used by members of law enforcement and within the context of courtroom proceedings. The word 'survivor' can speak to the sense of empowerment. In the end, it is imperative to follow the lead of the person seeking support as every person who has experienced domestic abuse has a unique journey. This involves asking how a victim wants to be addressed/referred to, as well as how they want their 'perpetrator/abuser' to be addressed.	Rather than using the terms 'victim,' 'survivor,' or 'perpetrator,' use the following terms instead: - Someone who has experienced domestic abuse - Someone who has perpetrated domestic abuse Where possible and appropriate, it is best to, in both instances, refer to the specific form of abuse that has been experienced/perpetrated. For example, an individual who has experienced/perpetrated intimate partner violence.
<i>'Not prioritising the safety/needs of their children and/or failing to protect'</i> This indicates that the victim of domestic violence is incapable of being a good parent and that they do not care for their child. It also gives the message that they are ones who are responsible for implementing the solution. The parent becomes accountable for their child's exposure to the domestic abuse, and this is known as failure to protect. This fails to acknowledge the perpetrators' role in exposing the child/children to harm.	Rather than using this sentence, use the following: <i>'The intensity of the abuse has impacted / is impacting on the person accessing services to protect child'</i> We blame victims for not prioritising their children rather than considering how they could be supported to do so while remaining safe. It's a huge juggling act for them.
<i>'They allowed the perpetrator into their home'</i> This sentence disregards the many reasons why victims may be forced to allow the perpetrator into their home. Victims may allow perpetrators into their homes in an attempt to defuse the situation out of fear for their own safety. For example, if the perpetrator continues to knock on the door, causing noise disruption, the victim may let them in to avoid further problems.	Rather than using this sentence, use the following: <i>'They had no other choice but to allow the perpetrator to come into their home'</i> <i>'Access was granted due to the risk of escalation'</i>

Inappropriate Term / Phrases / Sentence	Suggested Alternative
<i>'You are a standard / low / high risk victim'</i> There isn't much we can do about using these terms as they are necessary for services, however we need to consider how much of it affects the victims or their perception of their own circumstances.	Avoid referring to victims as 'standard / low / high risk victims' in front of them or be very careful how you phrase it. It's not nice to be told you're a 'high risk,' but being told you're a 'low/standard' risk may discourage a victim from reporting if they don't believe their case is being taken seriously.
Acronyms associated with domestic abuse <i>Refer to appendix 1 for a list of domestic abuse acronyms.</i>	It is important to avoid using acronyms whenever possible, and when they must be used, explain them by including a brief description of what they stand for and what they mean. As professionals, we are familiar with the acronyms associated with domestic abuse; however, those outside of the typical domestic abuse area may not know what DA, DASH, MARAC, IDVAS, ISVA, and other acronyms mean, making them inaccessible.
<i>'A domestic'</i> Using this term to refer to incidents or calls as responding to 'a domestic'.	Using this term diminishes the incident and implies an old school response. Rather, use the full term <i>'Domestic Abuse case'</i>.
<i>'It was the drink that made them do it'</i> Using this phrase excuses the perpetrators behaviour.	Rather than using this sentence, using the following instead: <i>'Alcohol was an exacerbating factor but not the cause of the behaviour'</i> <i>'Alcohol lowers our inhibitions, but does not make us do things / behave in certain ways'</i>
<i>'Why did you not ring the police?'</i> This places the onus on the victim to seek help to stop or prevent the domestic abuse. It also minimises the perpetrators accountability for perpetrating criminal behaviour.	Rather than using this sentence, using the following instead: <i>'What prevented you from being able to phone the police/call for help?'</i> <i>'Did anything in particular stop you from ringing the police'</i> <i>'Do you know how the police can help with this kind of situation'</i>
<i>'Victim chose to go back to the relationship'</i> This does not imply that there is any possibility of coercive control or that there is any opportunity to make a free and informed decision.	Rather than using this sentence, using the followings instead: <i>'The victim was drawn back into the relationship due to coercive control.'</i>

Inappropriate Term / Phrases / Sentence	Suggested Alternative
<i>‘The victim retaliated’</i> Retaliation is typically an impulsive action motivated by a sense of entitlement. This sentence fails to recognise that for victims, retaliation is not the goal, but rather survival. This should not deter them from being seen as a victim. Perpetrators can use the victim's "retaliation" to shift blame for the abuse onto the victim. Perpetrators can use this 'reaction abuse' as 'evidence' that the victim is mentally unstable or that the victim is the abuser. As a result, it is critical not to use this sentence because it may endanger the victim even more.	Rather than using this sentence, use the following: • <i>‘They defended themselves because they couldn’t take the abuse any longer due to fearing for their life and/or that of their children.’</i> • <i>‘The person needed to protect themselves in response to....’</i>
<i>‘Failed to engage’</i> This sentence victim blames and overlooks the complexities of why victims might not want to interact. Victims may feel overwhelmed when support agencies approach them, or they may mistrust professionals as a result of coercive control.	Rather than using this sentence use: • <i>‘The victim may be overwhelmed by the assistance provided and will need some time to process the available support.’</i>
<i>‘The victim has complex needs’</i> Victims of domestic abuse who have additional needs, such as substance abuse and/or mental health, may require a higher level of support.	Rather than using this sentence use: • <i>‘The victim has multiple needs /disadvantages.’</i>
<i>‘Why don’t you leave / Why do you stay’</i> We need to stop blaming victims for staying and instead support them in leaving. By understanding many barriers that stand in the way of a victim leaving an abusive relationship – be it psychological, emotional, financial, or physical threats – we can support and empower victims to make the best decision for them while holding perpetrators solely accountable for their behaviour.	Rather than using this sentence use: • <i>‘Were there any obstacles that kept you from leaving?’</i>

Appendix 1

Domestic Abuse Acronyms
<u>BAME / BME – Black and Ethnic Minority</u> Terms widely used by government departments, public bodies, the media, and others when referring to ethnic minority groups
<u>CAADA – Coordinated Action against Domestic Abuse</u> Previous name for Safelives, a leading national domestic abuse charity
<u>CCG – Clinical Commissioning Group</u> Created following the Health and Social Care Act in 2012 to replace primary care trusts on 1 April 2013. They are clinically led statutory NHS bodies responsible for the planning and commissioning of health care services for their local area.
<u>CIN – Child in Need</u> Defined under s.17 of the Children Act as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services; or a child whose health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled.
<u>CP – Child Protection</u> Part of the safeguarding process. It focuses on protecting individual children identified as suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.
<u>CSE – Child Sexual Exploitation</u> A form of sexual, emotional, and physical abuse of children
<u>CSP – Community Safety Partnership</u> CSPs consist of five 'responsible authorities' - police, local authority, fire and rescue authority, probation provider and Clinical Commissioning Groups and are under a duty to assess local community safety issues and draw up a partnership plan setting out their priorities
<u>DA – Domestic Abuse</u> Also referred to as DV (domestic violence) or DVA (domestic violence and abuse). The phrase "domestic abuse" is most commonly used to cover both physical violence and emotional harm or control, while "domestic violence" is often used to signify that the abuse is of a physical nature. However, the terms can be used interchangeably
<u>DASH – Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence (UK)</u> A checklist-based tool used by professionals as a starting point to identify the victims' level of risk of domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse Acronyms

DHR – Domestic Homicide Review

A multi-agency review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse, or neglect by a person to whom they were related or with whom they were, or had been, in an intimate personal relationship, or a member of the same household as themselves. Since 13 April 2011 there has been a statutory requirement for local areas to conduct a DHR following a domestic homicide that meets the criteria.

DLUHC – Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities

The Government department with responsibility for domestic abuse. Formerly called the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG).

FGM – Female Genital Mutilation

A procedure where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured, or changed, but there's no medical reason for this to be done.

FM – Forced Marriage

Where one or both people do not (or cannot) consent to the marriage as they are pressurised, or abuse is used, to force them to do so. It is recognised in the UK as a form of domestic or child abuse and a serious abuse of human rights.

HBA / HBV – (so-called) Honour Based Abuse / Violence

The generally accepted definition of this type of abuse is '*A crime or incident which has, or may have been, committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and / or community*'. It is often a form of domestic abuse.

MAPPA – Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements

Multi-agency public protection arrangements in place to ensure the successful management of violent and sexual offenders.

MARAC – Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference

A Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is a meeting that is held to discuss the most high-risk cases of domestic abuse and sexual violence, to share information and to safety plan to safeguard a victim.

MASH – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

Single point of contact for reporting concerns about a child in North East Lincolnshire.

MATAC – Multi Agency Tasking and Coordination

MATAC refers to the Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination process of identifying and tackling serial perpetrators of domestic abuse perpetrators.

IDVA – Independent Domestic Violence Advisor

The main purpose of an IDVA is to address the safety of victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners, or family members to secure their safety and the safety of their children.

Domestic Abuse Acronyms

ISVA – Independent Sexual Violence Advisor

An independent sexual violence advisor (ISVAS) addresses the safety and support needs of victims of sexual violence and abuse.

JSNA – Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

A JSNA looks at the current and future health and care needs of local populations to inform and guide the planning and commissioning (buying) of health, well-being, and social care services within a local authority area.

LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

Sometimes shortened to LGB, or lengthened to LGBTQ+ (the Q, standing for Queer).

LSCB – Local Safeguarding Children Board

Former name of the safeguarding Children Partnership, may be referred to in older documents.

LAC – Looked After Child

A child in public care, who are placed with foster carers, in residential homes or with parents or other relatives.

SAB – Safeguarding Adults Board

A statutory requirement for all local authorities for taking the lead role and overall responsibility for adult safeguarding. As a minimum, the SAB membership must comprise of three main statutory partners, these being North East Lincolnshire Council (NELC), Humberside Police and local health services.

SCP – Safeguarding Children Partnership

Three partners work together with a shared equal responsibility for safeguarding. They are Humberside Police, NHS North East Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group and North East Lincolnshire Council.

SPA – Single Point of Access

A single point of contact for residents for them to talk about their health and wellbeing needs.

VAWG – Violence against Women and Girls

This covers all types of violence against women and is much wider in definition and remit than domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is a form of VAWG.