First response quick reference guide - domestic abuse

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7 mins read

Ensure immediate safety

En route to the scene

- Consider the risk to officer and others at the scene (dynamic risk assessment – ongoing).
- Get a full picture of the incident and context from the call handler.
- If equipped with **body-worn video**, consider switching it on.

On arrival at the scene

- Ensure the safety of officers, victim, children and others at the scene.
- Separate the parties.
- Assess the need for first-aid or other medical assistance.
- If entry to property is refused, consider **police powers of entry**.
- Check the welfare and safety of any children – see the child and speak to them unless not in their best interest to do so – consider referring to local authority children's social care or exercising police protection powers.

See also **checklist: Actions on arrival at the scene.**

Build rapport

- Listen to the victim and make them feel believed.
- Reassure the victim that the role of the police is to protect them, not judge them.
- Ask yourself why a victim is being hostile or uncooperative and do not take it personally.
- Understand the dynamics of domestic abuse, especially **controlling or coercive behaviour**.

- Take each incident seriously no matter how many times you are called to the same address.
- Explain what you are doing and why.

See:

- **Why a victim might appear unwilling to engage**
- **Why do victims continue abusive relationships?**

Carry out an initial investigation

Build an **evidence-led case** that does not rely solely on the victim's support.

- Record demeanour of all parties and photograph/visually record scene and injuries.
- Protect the scene, including the victim, suspect and other witnesses.
- Obtain first accounts from victims and witnesses, including first disclosure witnesses.
- Remember you are a witness and your statement should include everything you see and hear in connection with the incident, including any details indicative of controlling or coercive behaviour.

See checklists:

- **Protecting the scene**.
- **Gaining a first account from a victim or witness**.
- **Conducting the victim interview**.
- **Statement of the first officer at the scene**.

You should also familiarise yourself with **investigative development** in domestic abuse cases.

At the scene, consider calling a crime scene examiner and think about:

- **physical evidence** – clothing and bedding, weapons, signs of disturbance
- **forensics** – blood pattern distribution, other biological evidence, footwear, DNA
- **photographic evidence**
- **CCTV**
- **house-to-house enquiries**
- **technology and social media** ? mobile phones, social media, email

For later development if you are OIC, think about:

- further database checks – **PNC**, **PND**, **ViSOR**, **ASSIST**
- **foreign intelligence checks**
- **bad character evidence**
- **medical records**
- **financial information**
- **prison intelligence**
- **ANPR**
- **CCTV**
- **covert tactics** and **sources**

See checklists:

- **Lines of enquiry**.
- **Use of photographic evidence**
- **Evidence-led prosecution**

Take positive action

Never ask the victim if they want the suspect arrested. That is your decision.

Consider **arrest**.

- Is it lawful, proportionate and necessary (Code G)? If so, you should arrest and will have to justify your decision if you do not.
- Avoid dual arrests at the scene if possible, especially if there are children present.

Dual arrests complicate the prosecution process and may leave children without either parent for a period of time. Investigation to identify the primary perpetrator at the scene is preferable unless dual arrests are considered necessary and proportionate in the circumstances. This does not prevent investigation and later arrest of the second party if both appear to have committed offences.

See **arresting the right person**, **dual arrests** and **determining the primary perpetrator and dealing with counter-allegations**.

If there are insufficient grounds for arrest or it would be disproportionate, you should focus on victim safety and prevention of further incidents. Consider other **positive action**, such as:

- **removal to prevent breach of the peace**
- **domestic violence protection notices and orders**
- **civil orders** – non-molestation, occupation or prohibited steps orders

Out of court disposals (**cautions** or **restorative justice**) may also be an option. They are rarely appropriate in domestic abuse cases, however, and supervisor/specialist input should be sought if being considered.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Identify risk

You are responsible for risk identification and assessment unless and until the case is handed over to a specialist or another investigating officer.

- Investigate the circumstances of the incident comprehensively to identify all issues relevant to your decision about level of risk, including any indication of controlling or coercive behaviour.
- Make an honest risk assessment based on your findings.
- Your risk assessment may be the only one done in response to the incident, depending on how you grade the risk – it needs to be as accurate as possible.

Get it right first time – use your force-recommended risk assessment tool, alongside professional judgement, intelligence and investigation.

See **risk identification and assessment**.

Initiate support and protection for the victim (initial safety planning)

Principles

- Every victim must be safer after police contact.
- **Keep the victim informed**.

Your job is to:

- initiate **safety planning** and set out options
- put into place any **urgent safeguarding** actions – a matter of hours may make all the difference
- refer to specialists for more detailed safety planning and referrals, for example, to a domestic abuse specialist officer, **IDVA**, or **MARAC**, in accordance with force policy.

If the case is not referred, safety planning remains your responsibility.

Options

- Consider if a **DVPN** is appropriate.
- **Referral to voluntary sector support agencies**, for example, Victim Support, Women's Aid, Refuge.
- **Emergency accommodation**.
- **Improve home security** and target-hardening measures, for example, change of locks, alarms, lighting.
- Improve personal security, for example, issue **personal safety device**.
- **Crime prevention strategies**, for example, cocoon watch, NPT involvement, sanctuary schemes.
- Methods to **manage the perpetrator's behaviour**.

Ensure a good handover

Ensure the handover pack contains all information relevant to the victim and children's safety.

This should include:

- any risk assessment and grading of risk
- information relevant to ongoing risk assessment, including any details indicative of controlling or coercive behaviour
- information relevant to the custody sergeant's decision to bail the suspect, with or without conditions, or remand in custody
- information relevant to an application before a court for a remand in custody, for example, colour photos of injuries
- details of any safety planning measures taken and any outstanding

Give the victim a point of contact and remind them to call the emergency services if there are any further incidents or bail breaches.

Normal **investigation handover** considerations apply.

Tags

Domestic abuse