

# The role of domestic abuse specialists in supporting investigation and incident management

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## Specialist roles

Arrangements for allocating and deploying specialist domestic abuse resources vary between forces. Some have dedicated domestic abuse units. Others locate their domestic abuse specialists in their public protection unit, where they may not be a dedicated resource but also carry out other public protection functions. Domestic abuse incidents are not necessarily routed through to specialist officers unless they are classed as being of a higher level of risk. Primary responsibility for investigation may, therefore, remain with the first responder/officer in the case (OIC).

Whatever the model, forces must ensure as a minimum that they have:

- a body of specialist officers, familiar with the dynamics of domestic abuse and with local knowledge of repeat victims and serial perpetrators, who can be called on to support first responders and other primary investigators
- specialist supervisors who have an overview of domestic abuse within their force area

Where reference is made to a domestic abuse specialist officer or supervisor in this APP, this refers to officers or supervisors having specialist responsibility for domestic abuse whatever form that may take in any particular force, not a specific job title.

## Investigation

Domestic abuse investigations should be conducted in a manner that ensures the safety and protection of the victim and any children and, if criminal offences are disclosed, enables the suspect to be held accountable through the criminal justice system.

The first responder attending a domestic abuse incident should apply the 'right first time' principle and be thorough, to support investigation development and the prosecution process.

Although first responders cover many of the following points in their initial training, domestic abuse specialist officers can provide valuable additional support, advice and insight where officers are unsure of procedure or are unfamiliar with local dynamics.

Tactical advice to officers might include the following:

- initial identification of risk factors, including how to look out for signs of controlling or coercive behaviour
- gathering and assessing all available information and intelligence
- developing initial lines of enquiry
- processes of victim and witness identification, interviewing and providing protection and support
- notifying the [child abuse investigation unit \(CAIU\)](#) or equivalent of safeguarding issues
- identifying, preserving, collecting and processing all available evidence
- consolidating evidence from previous incidents
- possible arrest and interviewing strategies for suspects
- post-arrest management of suspects, particularly advice concerning the risk considerations for police bail conditions
- consideration of [domestic violence prevention notices and orders \(DVPN/DVPO\)](#)
- appropriate sharing of information with relevant agencies (this should be supervised by the domestic abuse supervisor if the information is sensitive and personal)
- liaison with the CPS
- documenting and recording all required evidence and processes

Domestic abuse investigations may, following assessment, be identified as either volume or priority, or as serious and complex within the terms of force investigations policy and strategy. Those cases identified as serious and complex investigations will require an investigator competent in National Occupational Standards (NOS), defined in level 2 of the Professionalising Investigation Programme (PIP), to lead and conduct enquiries in the investigation. Cases categorised as high risk should normally be identified as serious and complex in the force investigation policy.

The Investigation: Initial Crime Investigators Development curriculum (available via [College Learn](#) to registered users) supports the development of competence in NOS for level 2 PIP. Domestic

abuse specialist officers who conduct serious and complex investigations but are not competent in these NOS should complete this programme and the domestic abuse modules within public protection core learning.

There are occasions when dual team input is required, for example, when there is a complaint of rape in a domestic abuse context. In such cases, the investigation requires input from all relevant specialist teams and the investigating officer should ensure that each team is notified and consulted accordingly.

Domestic abuse specialist officers should maintain close working links with [CAIUs](#), or their equivalent. They should ensure that the CAIU is notified of domestic abuse incidents in homes where children normally reside, even if the child was not present during the incident. The CAIU is then responsible for onward referral to local authority children's social care (LACSC) departments where appropriate. In some cases officers will need to collaborate to prepare information for review by [domestic abuse forums](#), [MARACs](#), [LSCBs](#) and [MAPPA](#), or similar, to ensure that reports reflect both the domestic abuse and child abuse issues within a case.

For further information see APP on [child abuse](#).

## Role of the domestic abuse specialist officer in investigation development

Police forces should consider working towards a model of deployment where domestic abuse specialist officers are available on, or at least available to, each shift. Such deployment would allow specialist officers to offer investigative advice, local knowledge and support to other officers providing a response to domestic abuse incidents.

Domestic abuse specialist officers should use their knowledge of domestic abuse offending to further the investigation and provide advice during any domestic abuse investigation process.

### Checklist: Role of the specialist domestic abuse officer

The role of the specialist domestic abuse officer includes:

- responding to domestic abuse incidents identified as serious and complex as part of the first response team, where appropriate

- responding to specific domestic abuse incidents as identified by the police domestic abuse supervisor
- providing advice to first response officers responding to domestic abuse incidents
- assisting and, on some occasions, taking full responsibility for the investigation development of serious, complex and high-risk domestic abuse cases
- identifying and assessing risk if not done by the first responder
- supervising risk assessment where applicable
- participating in the MARAC process as directed by senior officers
- managing identified risk factors and monitoring the implementation of safety measures, such as police watch schemes associated with cases
- assisting with preparing subject profiles and providing intelligence briefings
- engaging in the tasking and coordination processes to address high-risk and persistent offenders
- assisting police supervisors to assess the investigative response to domestic abuse incidents and related safeguarding children issues
- attending specialist domestic violence courts (SDVCs)
- advising and supporting commanders and hostage negotiators managing domestic sieges and hostage-taking incidents

Where deployed, a domestic abuse specialist officer should take particular responsibility in domestic abuse cases and should work to enhance the response team's overall knowledge and skill levels in the investigation.

## **Role of the domestic abuse specialist supervisor in supporting investigation development**

Domestic abuse specialist officers should be line-managed alongside other members of the response team where they are deployed as part of that team. This should be by the team supervisor or shift sergeant. Alternatively, they should report to a specialist supervisor who manages domestic abuse specific tasks within their role and will liaise with the shift supervisors.

Domestic abuse specialist supervisors should monitor domestic abuse specialist officers in the following aspects of their role:

- tactical investigative advice to police officers
- carrying out investigations in identified serious and complex or high-risk cases

- risk assessment
- liaison with CAIUs and public protection units
- partnership work in relation to domestic abuse
- tactical advice in siege and hostage situations

## Role of child abuse investigation units in domestic abuse investigation

Domestic abuse specialist officers should maintain routine contact with the [CAIU](#) (or equivalent) and refer appropriate cases. Domestic abuse supervisors should dip-sample domestic abuse cases to ensure that child abuse and safeguarding issues have been identified and properly notified to child abuse investigation officers.

Every effort should be made to coordinate investigation activity where child abuse and domestic abuse investigations coincide, for example, where both occur in the same family. In particular, officers should make referrals informing local authority children's social care (LACSC) departments of the details of children (as per local protocols) while ensuring that victims of domestic abuse do not fear the consequences of their involvement. The way referrals are made should not put domestic abuse victims at further risk, or dissuade them from supporting a prosecution. Domestic abuse specialist officers should be made aware of any home visits to be carried out by LACSC, to ensure victim issues are appropriately managed. Wherever possible, victims of domestic abuse should have the referral system explained to them as soon as is practicable so that they are prepared for any contact with LACSC departments.

Where dual investigations are ongoing, the CAIU should assume responsibility for liaising with other agencies. They should also coordinate the attendance of domestic abuse specialist supervisors or officers at case conferences or similar meetings.

For further information see [APP on information sharing](#).

## Providing tactical advice in domestic abuse sieges and hostage-taking incidents

A proportion of siege and hostage-taking incidents managed by the police are domestic abuse-related. The links with domestic abuse should be made at the earliest stage so that the lives of

victims, suspects and police personnel are protected. Police operations to contain such incidents, and investigations relating to these incidents, should use domestic abuse intelligence and the expertise of domestic abuse specialist officers to assist with the safe conclusion of incidents and the effectiveness of any associated investigation.

Domestic abuse specialists should be available to provide direct advice to siege commanders and hostage negotiators dealing with domestic sieges and hostage-taking incidents.

Training for siege commanders and hostage negotiators should incorporate the potential **risk factors** associated with domestic abuse. Table-top training exercises and critical incident training which address siege and hostage-taking situations should include domestic abuse, particularly the risk factors affecting it after separation and where there are child contact disputes.

Domestic abuse specialists should be ready to provide the following information to siege commanders and hostage negotiators:

- intelligence or a criminal history suggesting previous domestic abuse or child abuse in current or previous relationships
- any current or past civil order which has been in place
- any known child contact restrictions under the **Children Act 1989** or disputes relating to child contact
- factors potentially associated with domestic abuse identified in the case such as suicide threats or threats to kill
- details of any safety planning carried out with the victim or previous victims
- details of any relevant risk assessments
- suggestions relating to conversation management with the suspect

## Monitoring cases

Domestic abuse specialist supervisors should monitor domestic abuse cases across their area, including those dealt with outside the domestic abuse or public protection unit. They should develop strategies to ensure that they:

- are made aware of new cases
- work with custody sergeants to monitor relevant custody processes, for example, correct identification of domestic abuse cases at point of charge so that defendants are bailed to

an SDVC, and appropriate use of bail conditions

- support domestic abuse specialist officers to play an active role in the SDVC system
- regularly review progress of ongoing cases
- review recent successful and unsuccessful outcomes to develop learning and improve investigative approaches in domestic abuse cases – this should be done in consultation with the CPS

The information collated within the unit should be used to actively identify, target and engage with known victims and perpetrators.

They should also collate any performance indicator data and monitor police performance in domestic abuse cases, using a range of appropriate internal and external measures. For further information see [partnership working and multi-agency responses](#).

## Tags

Domestic abuse