

# Domestic abuse NEW - Guidance overview

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

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Domestic abuse is a fundamental issue for policing that:

- is both high-volume and high-risk
- represents a significant proportion of recorded crime
- often leads to serious harm or homicide

The police have a responsibility to:

- recognise patterns of abuse
- reduce risk
- ensure that victims are safer after every contact with the police

This authorised professional practice (APP) provides guidance on the police approach to domestic abuse. It emphasises:

- early risk assessment
- safety planning and support
- evidence-led investigation and prosecution

This APP is aimed at:

- call handlers and first point of contact staff
- first response officers
- supervisors and managers
- investigators
- senior leaders

It is also relevant to:

- specialist domestic abuse officers and staff
- learning and development leads
- non-Home Office police forces

- partner agencies with safeguarding responsibilities

## Definitions

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) provides the statutory definition of domestic abuse.

A behaviour is domestic abuse if both of the following apply:

- both parties are aged 16 years or over and are personally connected
- the behaviour is abusive

Abusive behaviour includes:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological or emotional abuse

Abuse may be a single incident or a course of conduct. A perpetrator's behaviour can be considered abusive towards a victim even when directed at another person, such as the victim's child.

Economic abuse is defined as behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on victim's ability to either:

- acquire, use or maintain money or other property
- obtain goods or services

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) established the role of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to:

- provide public leadership
- monitor provision of services
- promote best practice

The Victims' Commissioner continues to monitor:

- compliance with the [Victims' Code](#) and [Witness Charter](#)

- wider support for victims and witnesses

The offence of [controlling or coercive behaviour](#) is provided within [section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015](#). This applies where the victim and perpetrator are personally connected.

## Associated investigations and supporting guidance

This APP covers all forms of domestic abuse. While there are core requirements and statutory responsibilities in every case, some investigations will involve crime types or victim considerations that require additional consideration.

Further advice and information is provided across three appendices, which should be read alongside this APP where relevant. These are:

- [Appendix A: Associated investigations](#)
- [Appendix B: Issues affecting certain groups of domestic abuse victims](#)
- [Appendix C: Checklists, guides and support](#)

References to these appendices are included throughout the APP where additional context or specialist considerations may support decision making.

## Terminology

### Victim

The term 'victim' is used in line with the Ministry of Justice [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales](#) (2020). It recognises the harm experienced by those subjected to domestic abuse.

### Perpetrator

The term 'perpetrator' is used to describe a person who commits domestic abuse. Depending on the stage of the criminal justice process, the terms 'suspect', 'defendant' or 'offender' may also apply. 'Abuser' is sometimes used for ease of readability.

### Personally connected

Under the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#), two people are personally connected if they are, or have been:

- married or civil partners
- engaged or in an intimate personal relationship
- relatives (as defined in the [Family Law Act 1996](#))
- parents of the same child or have parental responsibility for the same child

Cohabitation is not required for this definition.

## Children and young people

A child under 18 years is also legally recognised as a victim in their own right if they both:

- see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse
- are related to the victim or perpetrator

For further information, go to:

- [Child abuse](#)
- [Children as victims](#)

## Serial perpetrator

A serial perpetrator is someone reported to the police as having committed or threatened domestic abuse against two or more victims. This may involve current or former intimate partners or family members. Forces should track serial perpetrators to support risk management and safeguarding decisions.

When determining whether someone falls within the definition of serial perpetrator, police officers should consider all information disclosed by foreign national checks (or checks on UK persons abroad). Not all offences disclosed by foreign national checks can be recorded on [Police National Computer \(PNC\)](#).

There are also restrictions on the use of disclosed information beyond the case for which the request was submitted. This limits the use of foreign national information for solely monitoring purposes. Where information not held on PNC may be relevant to assessing an offender's serial

status in a specific case, police officers should request a foreign national check.

Further information is available in the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) [Domestic abuse guidelines for prosecutors](#), previous domestic abuse incidents and serial offenders.

Terminology in this APP is intended to ensure clarity, consistency and accuracy in recording, investigation and safeguarding.

For further information, go to:

- [Domestic abuse statutory guidance](#)
- [Domestic Abuse Commissioner's strategic plan](#)
- [Victims' Commissioner Strategy: October 2024 to December 2025](#)
- [Identification, assessment and management of serial or potentially dangerous domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators](#)

## Tags

APP Domestic abuse