

# Domestic Violence and abuse

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## Introduction

Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence and abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background.

Domestic violence and abuse are problems in our society with damaging far-reaching impacts. DWP has a range of measures designed to provide assistance and support victims of domestic violence and abuse.

An estimated 2 million adults aged 16 to 59 experience domestic abuse, which is approximately 6 in 100 adults. Data also shows women were around twice as likely to have experienced domestic abuse as men. Male and female victims will have different experiences of domestic abuse, their support needs may be different.

Victims of domestic abuse often flee their homes with little or no possessions and no access to their own economic resources, or a financial safety net. Financial assistance through Universal Credit can be essential to provide for themselves or themselves and their children.

A claimant's circumstances could mean work-related requirements need to be temporarily switched off (easements). There is a specific list of circumstances for

when the switch-off (easements) can apply see Switching off requirements (Easements) for Labour Market regime interventions. This includes when the claimant is or has been a victim of domestic violence and abuse.

### **What is domestic violence and abuse?**

The government definition of domestic violence and abuse is “any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality”. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- **Physical:** this can include shaking, smacking, punching, kicking, presence of finger or bite marks, bruising, starving, tying up, stabbing, suffocation, throwing things, using objects as weapons, genital mutilation or 'honour violence'. Physical effects are often in areas of the body that are covered and hidden (for example, breasts, legs and stomach)
- **Sexual:** this can include forced sex, forced prostitution, ignoring religious prohibitions about sex, refusal to practise safe sex, sexual insults, passing on sexually transmitted diseases or preventing breastfeeding
- **Psychological:** this can include intimidation, insulting, isolating the person from friends and family, criticising, denying the abuse, treating the person as an inferior, threatening to harm children or take them away or forced marriage
- **Economic/Financial:** for example, not letting the person work, undermining efforts to find work or study, refusing to give money, asking for an explanation of how every penny is spent, making the person beg for money, gambling or not paying bills
- **Emotional:** this can include swearing, undermining confidence, making racist, sexist or other derogatory remarks, making the person feel unattractive, calling the person stupid or useless or eroding the person's independence
- **Controlling behaviour:** a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour
- **Coercive behaviour:** an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim

This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. It is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

The switch-off of work-related requirements applies in relation to domestic violence and abuse (actual or the threat of) by the claimant's current or former partner(s), or by certain family members of the claimant, their partner or former partner. Step relatives are also included as family members.

### **Identifying and safeguarding claimants**

When communicating with claimants, they may display signs, behaviors and language or talk about a life event suggesting they may have complex personal circumstances, for example fleeing domestic abuse.

If it becomes apparent that a claimant has been or is a victim of domestic violence and abuse, as soon as they feel able a discussion about their circumstances should take place.

Where ever possible as a safeguarding measure, a claimant may feel more comfortable talking confidentially in a private room without any third parties present and given this option if appropriate. If necessary alert the appropriate authorities to safeguard the claimant or their children, see Safeguarding vulnerable people.

The District Provision Tool and local Complex Needs Toolkit can also help to provide the appropriate support for claimants with other additional complex needs.

### **Providing assistance to claimants**

A range of measures can be put in place to support claimants who are survivors of domestic abuse, depending on their circumstances. The discussion needs to explain what assistance can be given for example:

- the availability of split payments may be appropriate to have access to an independent income, though any risks need to be taken into account to allow this Alternative Payment Arrangement to be delivered safely
- help to cope with managing money on a monthly basis and paying bills on time via signposting to money guidance / debt advice
- if appropriate the availability of advances to provide immediate financial support for victims fleeing abuse or possibly to get help buying essential household items or rent in advance see Complex needs Financial Hardship section for Advances
- Assisted Digital Support or Help to Claim to help make and maintain their Universal Credit by online self-service

- paying rent for two homes, if fleeing their home through fear of violence but intend to return, see Paying for two homes
- establish if the claimant meets the [criteria to have their work-related requirements switched off](#)
- considering alternative methods of payment available if the claimant does not have access to a bank account
- identity verification if the claimant has fled abuse and is unable to provide documentation
- GOV.UK provides information on [Help available from DWP for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse](#)

Staff may find it challenging to respond to claimants who experience domestic abuse. They may experience domestic abuse themselves. For support, staff can talk to their line manager, a trusted colleague and the DWP Employee Assistance Programme as well as the organisations listed below.

### **Supporting victims of domestic violence and abuse**

If the claimant has access to the Internet signpost them to the [GOV.UK](#) website. Claimants can then search the site for 'domestic violence' to find information which will enable them to get the expert help and advice they need from specialist support services. Details can be printed from the site and issued to the claimant as appropriate.

Claimants may have an appointee or with the claimant's consent, a support worker can assist in maintaining and managing their Universal Credit account. For information that can be provided to third parties see Consent and disclosure.

The following is a list of organisations available that may be able to assist the claimant:

- the **National Domestic Violence Helpline** – is run jointly with [Women's Aid](#) and [Refuge](#) and is a 24 hour, free phone national service (claimants can contact the National Domestic Violence Helpline on: 0808 2000 247 or <http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk>). Staff can also use the helpline to obtain guidance from professionals
- for local area support services, search the **Domestic Abuse Directory**: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory/>
- In **Wales** call the All-Wales 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 80 10 800 or visit the [Welsh Women's Aid](#) website
- in **Scotland** call the Freephone 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline 0800 027 1234 or visit the [Scottish Women's Aid website](#)
- **Karma Nirvana** is the specialist helpline for forced marriage and honour based abuse. It is open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday 0800 599 247 or visit the website [karmanirvana.org.uk](http://karmanirvana.org.uk)

- **Galop** is the LGBT+ anti-violence charity which runs the National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0800 999
- Victim Support on 0808 16 89 111 open 24/7 or visit the [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk) website
- Revenge Porn Helpline, open 10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday 0345 6000 459, or visit [revengepornhelpline.org.uk](http://revengepornhelpline.org.uk)
- **Broken Rainbow** – provides information, advice and support to gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender populations who may be affected by domestic violence and abuse (claimants can contact Broken Rainbow on 0300 999 5428)
- the **National Stalking Helpline** – provides guidance and information to anybody who is currently or has previously been affected by harassment or stalking (claimants can contact the National Stalking Helpline on 0808 802 0300 or e-mail <mailto:advice@stalkinghelpline.org>)
- **Male Advice (and Enquiry) Line** – offers help to male victims of domestic violence and abuse and advice to perpetrators (claimants can contact the Men's Advice and enquiry line on: 0808 801 0327 or at <http://www.mensadvice.org.uk/>)
- **RESPECT** – offers information and advice to people who are abusive towards their partners and want help to stop (claimants can contact respect on: 0808 8024040 or <http://www.respect.uk.net/>)
- **GOV.UK Report Domestic Abuse** – provides a list of organisations victims can talk to and report domestic violence and abuse

This is not a complete list

### **Domestic violence and abuse switching off (Easement) criteria**

Any claimant, in any conditionality regime, who states that they have been a victim of actual or threatened domestic violence and abuse is eligible to have their work-related requirements switched off as long as:

- the incident or pattern of domestic violence and abuse occurred within the previous six months
- the incident or pattern meets the definition of domestic violence and abuse
- they are not living at the same address as the abuser
- they have not had a previous domestic violence and abuse switch off within the last 12 months
- they provide written evidence within one month of notifying Universal Credit

The switching off requirements period starts on the date the claimant notifies us. A claimant may notify an incident of domestic violence and abuse within 6 months but may not be seen by an agent until after the time limit has expired. In these circumstances the switching off requirements period will start from the date they first made contact.

If the claimant remains in the same household as the person who inflicted or threatened the domestic violence and abuse they are not eligible for the domestic violence and abuse switching off requirements (Easement). In this circumstance, if relevant evidence is provided the Domestic Emergency switching off requirements (Easements) can be used where it is appropriate to switch off all requirements for a period of time.

If the claimant is in a refuge or other emergency accommodation they may need time to sort out alternative accommodation. If no relevant evidence is provided the Domestic Emergency switching off (Easement) is considered due to homelessness, along with any other support being received. See Homelessness and at risk of homelessness for further information.

### **Relevant evidence**

Relevant evidence is written evidence from a person acting in an official capacity showing that:

- the claimant's circumstances are consistent with those of a person who has had domestic violence and abuse inflicted upon them (or has received threats of violence or abuse) during the 6 months prior to the claimant notifying Universal Credit
- the claimant has made contact with the person acting in an official capacity in relation to such an incident, which occurred during that period

A person acting in an official capacity means:

- a healthcare professional
- a police officer
- a registered social worker / Social Care Wales
- the claimant's employer or a representative of their trade union
- any public, voluntary or charitable body which has had direct contact with the claimant in connection with domestic violence and abuse

For the full 13-week domestic violence and abuse easement to apply, the claimant must provide evidence within one month of the date of the notification. If evidence is not supplied within this time limit, then the easement ends after one month from the date of the notification.

### **Duration of Switching off (Easement) period**

Switching off requirements is vital to victims of domestic violence and abuse as they often face significant barriers to employment. For example:

- economic abuse often means they are prevented from working, and barred access to education, training and employment over a long period of time

- most survivors will have experienced severe trauma as a result of psychological, emotional and physical abuse both during the relationship, and after it has ended and will want access to work when they are ready
- a regular travel pattern to work for residents in a refuge would compromise the refuge's secret location if they were followed

There are some differences in the length of time any switching off requirements will apply and which work-related requirements must be switched off depending on the claimant. For domestic violence and abuse easement, these are as follows:

- all claimants
  - in any conditionality regime, must not have work-related requirements imposed for up to 13 weeks
- a responsible carer of a child, in the Intensive Work Search regime:
  - must not have work search and availability requirements imposed for a further 13 weeks (bringing the total up to 26 weeks)
  - after the first 13 weeks, claimants should be offered voluntary review to see whether they want to take up the offer of work-related support on voluntary basis
- a responsible carer of a child, in any conditionality group:
  - should not have any work-related requirements imposed for 26 weeks
  - any requirements undertaken must be on a voluntary basis and no sanction should apply within this 26-week period if a claimant does not undertake any work-related requirement

Domestic abuse has a significant effect on children, which is damaging and often long lasting. The child's health, development, ability to learn and their physical and mental well-being can be affected. Domestic abuse is also the most common factor where children are at risk of serious harm. The claimant's ability to fulfil work-related requirements in these circumstances are likely to be severely impacted.

If the claimant is not eligible to have their work-related requirements switched off because of domestic violence and abuse, a main carer may still be eligible to have work search/availability requirements switched off if they are dealing with a child in considerable distress.

### **Domestic abuse or violence awareness video**

This domestic violence and abuse video contains sensitive subject matters which may affect some people, please ensure that you take time out after watching the video to reflect, discuss and debrief with your line manager, particularly if you are affected by its content.

Domestic violence and abuse (8min 44secs)  
Domestic violence and abuse awareness video transcript