

Protecting claimants at risk: Guidance

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The purpose of protecting claimants at risk

Measures are in place to ensure that staff are aware of, and can recognise, the signs of someone who could be at risk.

Agents must make sure that they are aware:

- of the procedures to follow when a concern is raised, and
- how this is reported this to the appropriate authorities

For Information on district procedures and contact details, see the District Provision tool.

How to protect claimants at risk

Having measures in place and using them to protect the health, well-being and human rights of individuals, enables them to live free from abuse, harm and neglect and will help to protect claimants at risk. This could be:

- the claimant
- a member of the claimant's family, or
- someone in the household (including children, young person or adult)

It is important to ensure that everyone is supported in getting access to the help they need and that any person at risk is protected.

Warning signs that are missed, or concerns that are not reported could have serious consequences and leave vulnerable individuals open to abuse, harm and neglect.

Agents are asked to look, listen, ask questions and consider other sources of information which might build a better understanding of the claimant's circumstances.

For further information, see Complex needs: other needs and situations.

The 6 principles of protecting claimants at risk

The following 6 principles must be considered when deciding how best to support or protect individuals:

1. Empowerment and participation – to support and encourage claimants to make their own decisions. Help them to access additional support or encourage them to discuss their situation and develop a plan that Universal Credit can support.
2. Prevention to support claimants – to take action before harm happens. Act on the information you know or have heard, discuss with managers and or advanced customer support leads.
3. The amount of involvement - to not intrude more than is necessary to keep the claimant and staff safe. Gather information to make an informed decision on the steps that need to be taken to manage the risk identified.
4. Protection, to support claimants when they need help. Establish the risk and consider the help available from other local organisations or authorities to determine the best outcome for the claimant.
5. Work together, work with local organisations or authorities to find the best ways to keep the claimant safe. The District Provision Tool provides information on the help available and contact details.
6. Accountability – to clearly explain advanced customer support, what action we are taking and why.

Complex needs that may lead to an issue of risk

Claimants identified as having additional needs may have difficulty accessing the Universal Credit Service. They may have difficulty understanding or accepting the conditions of claiming Universal Credit and complying with any requirements they must undertake.

Additional needs may relate to:

- learning or physical disability
- mental illness
- homelessness
- experiencing domestic abuse
- drug or alcohol addiction
- being an ex-offender
- being a local authority care leaver

Protecting claimants at risk provides them with the help and support they need and takes account of their abilities and circumstances when considering what they are capable of.

For further information, see Complex needs: other needs and situations.

Suicide and self-harm

If a claimant expresses thoughts about suicide or self-harm, these must be taken seriously and the appropriate help and intervention offered at the earliest point.

For further information, see Suicide or self-harm: Universal Credit Six Point Plan.

Recognising abuse, harm and neglect

When interacting with claimants and their families, we need to recognise signs of abuse, harm or neglect. The individual(s) may not ask for help, or be able to ask for help, but their behavior or the information they disclose may raise a concern.

If a claimant has given consent for someone to act on their behalf, this will be visible on their account.

Where no response is received from the claimant on the service, by phone or post, a visiting officer referral can be considered if it is appropriate.

The following are areas which may raise concern:

- **financial or material abuse** - including stealing, selling assets, fraud, misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits
- **domestic abuse** - including psychological, physical, sexual, financial, economic, emotional abuse, so called 'honour' based violence
- **psychological or emotional abuse** - including belittling, name calling, threats of harm, intimidation, isolation
- **self-neglect** - covers a wide range of behaviour including neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings
- **discriminatory abuse** - including racist, homophobic, sexist, abuse based on a person's disability and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment
- **neglect and acts of omission** - including the withholding of the necessities of life such as medication, food or warmth, ignoring medical or physical care needs
- **institutional or organisational** - including regimented routines and cultures, unsafe practices, lack of person-centred care or treatment, observed lack of dignity and respect in the care setting, rigid routine,

processes or tasks organised to meet staff needs in that care setting, disrespectful language and attitudes

- **modern slavery** – this is the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men using force, coercion abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation

Claimants experiencing harm and abuse

Universal Credit staff must always be alert to possible signs of harm and abuse. If necessary, agents must alert the appropriate authorities to protect the claimant, their children or anyone agents come into contact with. Guidance is available at disclosing personal data for safeguarding.

Agents must check the local authority's website to find out how to report cases of claimants who are at risk of harm and abuse in their area.

When talking to claimants, agents must listen for anything that might alert them to the possibility that the claimant, their dependents, or someone in their care might be in danger. To obtain information, Agents should ask relevant questions for example:

- what are you frightened of?
- who are you frightened of?
- who are you fearful for
- what do you think might happen?
- are you in immediate danger?

Agents must inform their line manager and call the emergency services if they believe that someone is in immediate danger.

If the claimant is not in immediate danger, the agent should advise them to contact their local neighbourhood policing team for advice.

In all cases where agents identify a claimant is at risk of harm and abuse, they must inform their line manager straight away and consider Easements or switching-off Labour Market regime interventions.

From time to time, claimants will occasionally report circumstances in their lives which raise concerns about their safety or well-being. If a claimant is suffering from domestic abuse, there are many organisations that claimants can be signposted to for support. See Domestic abuse for links to these organisations.

Responding to concerns a claimant is at risk

Conversations with a claimant about abuse, harm or neglect must be handled sensitively. The concern, support offered, and action taken must be fully

recorded so that anyone else supporting the claimant is aware of any complex needs.

If the claimant is on the phone they will not be put on hold, but the call may be muted while a colleague's assistance is obtained. The colleagues support may include finding supporting information, calling emergency services, and acting as a witness to the conversation.

Where it is clear a claimant or a child is at risk, DWP does not need the claimant's permission (consent) to give information to the police or local authority (relevant body). For further information, see Complex needs: consent and disclosure.

If a claimant is in immediate danger, contact the police and make a referral. If there is a risk of self-harm or suicide, see Suicide or self-harm: Universal Credit Six Point Plan Framework.

When a risk is identified, information held on the claimants account must be checked and the concern raised with a team leader or SPOC to decide:

- if there is someone or an organisation who can be contacted
- what support can be given and the action to take
- whether to involve the police or the local authority

When all forms of support have been considered and exhausted a referral to Advanced Customer Support Senior Leader (ACSSL) may be required.

See When should I refer a case to an ACSSL and the options to investigate before making a referral.

Following an incident, agents may need to be supported by talking through the incident with line managers and or other colleagues. They should be allowed time to reflect on the situation and to consider their own wellbeing.

Agents can contact Employee Support or use Live Chat to talk with a counsellor immediately on the Wellness site's Employee Help page. More details can be found at Employee Assistance Programme.

Support and advice where there is believed to be a risk

Whether a claimant states there is or is not a risk, if an agent believes there is or may be a risk, they will signpost the claimant to relevant information using the District Provision Tool (DPT) and any local complex needs tool. Not all local support organisations are on the DPT.

These tools are used to identify what help is available and the procedures for raising a concern. The tools include information about who to contact and which organisations can offer the appropriate support to claimants.

See Complex needs: other needs and situations for information about other organisations which can provide additional support to claimants.

Maintaining personal role and boundaries

Agents need to understand their role, responsibilities when supporting claimants, what is expected of them and their limitations when dealing with a risk concern. This will protect them and the claimant and ensure that a professional distance is maintained.

Agents also need to be aware of the expert support available from partner organisations. This will allow them to respond to any concerns by signposting claimants quickly and appropriately.

For further information, see the standards of behaviour policy and procedures.