



HM Government

**UNDERSTANDING  
DOMESTIC ABUSE  
FOR THE  
ASK FOR ANI  
CODEWORD SCHEME**



**#YouAreNotAlone**

# Introduction

**Home is not always a safe place. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into focus the impact of lockdown on domestic abuse victims and reinforced the importance of domestic abuse being ‘everyone’s business’.**

This does not just apply to a lockdown situation and is equally true as restrictions change. Therefore, the domestic abuse codeword scheme Ask for ANI (Action Needed Immediately) is being established in pharmacies to enable victims of domestic abuse to access support within their local community.

As a member of staff in a pharmacy that is supporting Ask for ANI, you may have the opportunity to support individuals who are experiencing domestic abuse. This guide provides information about domestic abuse.

[Additional information](#) has been provided separately to explain how you can provide a safe and supportive response to individuals who use the codeword.

Please note that separate information is also available for pharmacies running the **Safe Spaces scheme**.

## Topics covered in this guide include:

1. What is domestic abuse?
2. Who can experience domestic abuse?
3. Understanding power and control
4. Understanding the cycle of abuse
5. Understanding why victims don't leave
6. Key statistics about domestic abuse
7. Challenging the myths



# What is domestic abuse?

The UK government's definition of domestic abuse is:

*“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or 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.”*

Find out more at [GOV.UK/domestic-abuse](https://www.gov.uk/domestic-abuse)

## More definitions of domestic abuse are available at:

- Safer Scotland
- Live Fear Free Wales
- Domestic Violence and Abuse Northern Ireland



## Learn more

- Crown Prosecution Service
- Victim Support
- Women's Aid
- SafeLives

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

## Coercive control

This is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation, or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten the victim. This controlling behaviour is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulating their everyday behaviour. It is defined in statutory guidance as “a purposeful pattern of behaviour which takes place over time in order for one individual to exert power, control or coercion over another” (Home Office, 2015).



## Learn more

- [Understanding coercive control \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Coercive control and the defense of liberty – academic article by Professor Evan Stark](#)
- [Hidden in plain sight \(YouTube\)](#)
- [I had no idea – This Morning \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Coercive control – male victims](#)

# What is domestic abuse?

## Psychological/emotional abuse

This can include:

- Verbal abuse, such as yelling, insulting or swearing at the victim
- Rejection, such as rejecting the victim's thoughts, ideas and opinions
- Gaslighting, which is making the victim doubt their own feelings and thoughts, including their sanity, by manipulation of the truth
- Put downs, such as name calling or telling the victims they're stupid, publicly embarrassing them and blaming them for everything

The aim of emotional abuse is to chip away at the victim's feelings of self-worth and independence, leaving them feeling that there's no way out of the relationship, or that without the abuser, they have nothing.



### Learn more

- [Relate – emotional abuse](#)
- [What is gaslighting?](#)

## Physical abuse

This includes any physically aggressive behaviour or indirect physically harmful behaviour. This may include, but is not limited to, hitting, kicking, biting, slapping, shaking, pushing, pulling, punching, choking, beating, scratching, pinching, pulling hair, stabbing, shooting, drowning, burning, hitting with an object, threatening with a weapon, or threatening to physically assault.

## Sexual abuse

This is any situation when a person is forced to participate in unwanted, unsafe or degrading sexual activity. Forced sex, even by a spouse or intimate partner with whom you also have consensual sex, is an act of sexual abuse.



### Learn more

- [Citizen's Advice – Rape and sexual assault](#)
- [Tea and consent](#)
- [What is a Sexual Assault Referral Centre?](#)

## Financial or economic abuse

This involves controlling a victim's ability to acquire, use and maintain financial resources and be independent materially. Many victims are prevented from working. Others are required to work additional hours or undertake two jobs with the expectation that they will be 'providers'.



### Learn more

- [What is economic abuse?](#)
- [How to identify financial abuse](#)

# What is domestic abuse?

## Harassment and stalking

This can be defined as persistent and unwanted attention that makes the victim feel pestered and harassed. It includes behaviour that happens two or more times, directed at or towards the victim by another person, which causes them to feel alarmed or distressed or to fear that violence might be used against them.



### Learn more

- [Sky News – stalking](#)
- [Stalking – BBC News](#)
- [Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)
- [Stalking and Harassment – Crown Prosecution Service](#)

## Online or digital abuse

This may include stalking, relentless texting or calling, monitoring or control over social media and communications, video/audio recording and revenge porn.



### Learn more

- [Women's Aid – online and digital abuse](#)
- [Digital Abuse in Relationships – What you need to know](#)
- [Revenge Porn Helpline](#)

## Honour-based violence (HBV)

This can be described as a collection of practices (forced marriage, female genital mutilation) that are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs, and/or honour. Such violence can occur when abusers (primarily family members and often multiple abusers) perceive that a relative has shamed the family and/or community by breaking their honour code. The Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) guidance on forced marriage and other forms of "honour"-based violence suggests that LGBT+ people may face these forms of abuse from relatives or others in their community as a result of how their sexual orientation or gender identity is perceived. The CPS notes that this may include use of forced marriage to "cure" LGBT+ people, or the use of "corrective" rape.



### Learn more

- [What is forced marriage?](#)
- [Honour-based violence and forced marriage – Crown Prosecution Service](#)
- [What is female genital mutilation \(FGM\)?](#)
- [Forced marriage – Asma's story \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Forced marriage – Azim's story \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Hidden Harms \(YouTube\)](#)

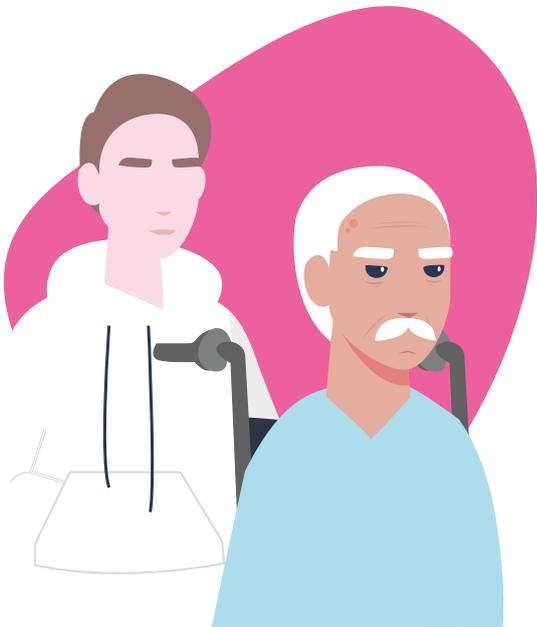
# Who can experience domestic abuse?

Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background. In the majority of cases, domestic abuse is perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner, within both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Domestic abuse can also come from a family member or carer.



[Learn more](#)

- [Gender-based violence \(YouTube\)](#)
- [20 Voices – Male victims \(YouTube\)](#)



# Understanding power and control within domestic abuse

Despite what many people believe, domestic abuse does not take place because an abuser loses control over their behaviour. In fact, abusive behaviour is a deliberate choice to gain control. Abusers will often use a variety of tactics to manipulate and exert their power, including:

- **Dominance** – Abusive individuals need to feel in charge of the relationship. They may make decisions for the victim and the family, tell them what to do, and expect them to obey without question. The abuser may treat them as a servant, child, or even their possession.
- **Humiliation** – An abuser may do everything they can to lower the victim's self-esteem or make them feel defective in some way. If the victim believes they're worthless and that no one else will want them, they're less likely to leave. Insults, name-calling, shaming and public put-downs are all weapons of abuse designed to erode the victim's self-worth and make them feel powerless.
- **Isolation** – To increase the victim's dependence on them, an abusive partner may cut them off from the outside world and the people who can help them. They may keep them from seeing family or friends, or even prevent them from going to work or school. The victim may have to ask permission to do anything, go anywhere or see anyone. They may insist their victim regularly reports back on what they are doing and who they are with.
- **Threats** – Abusers commonly use threats to keep their partners from leaving or scare them into dropping charges. The abuser may threaten to hurt or kill the victim or their children, other family members, or even their pets. They may also threaten to commit suicide, file false charges against the victim or report them to children's social services.
- **Intimidation** – The abuser may use a variety of intimidation tactics designed to scare the victim into submission. This could include making threatening looks or gestures, smashing things in front of them, destroying property, hurting pets, or putting weapons on display. The message behind these actions is that violent consequences will follow if the victim doesn't obey.
- **Denial and blame** – Abusers are adept at making excuses for the inexcusable. They may blame their abusive and violent behaviour on a bad childhood, a bad day, or even on the victim and their children. They may minimise the abuse or even deny that it occurred.



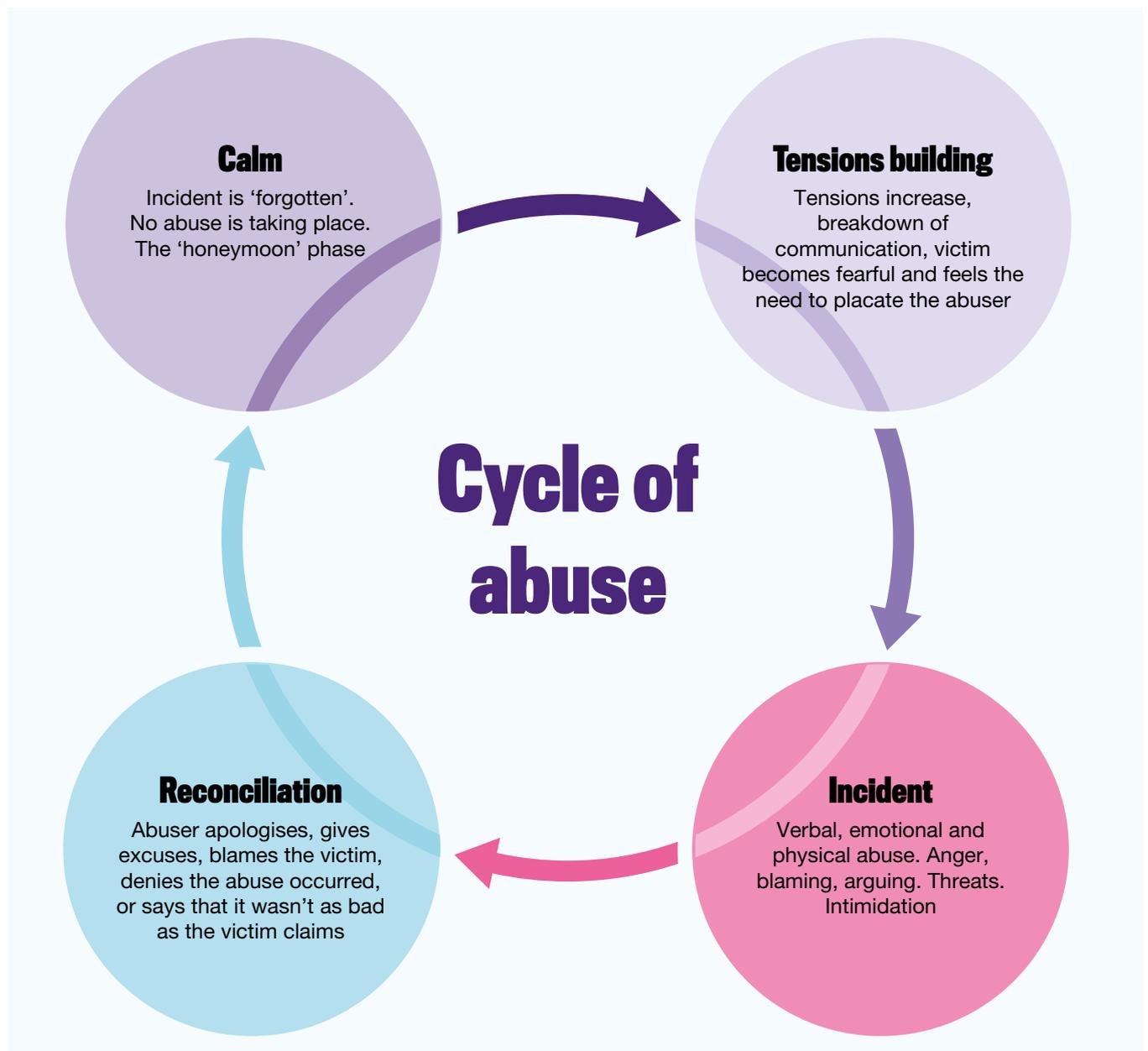
[Learn more](#)

- [Power and control wheel](#)

# The cycle of abuse

Domestic abuse victims will often report that they are not constantly experiencing abuse, and/or that it is inflicted at random times. There appears to be a definite pattern for the abuse, which is recurring and has distinct phases. This pattern is commonly referred to as the 'cycle of abuse' and may help you to understand at what stage a victim may use the codeword. It is important to note that the

model below generally applies to women experiencing abuse by men in intimate partner relationships. However, the same means of abuse are used by perpetrators of either gender, in same-sex relationships and in family abuse. The difference will be on how much they rely on any one form of abuse to gain power and control within their circumstances.



# Understanding the cycle of abuse

## Tension building

This phase can last anywhere from minutes to weeks. In it, stress builds and abusers may begin to feel wronged, ignored or neglected. They may accuse, shout, demand and/or have unrealistic expectations, while the victim feels like they are walking on eggshells, is afraid and becomes anxious. Victims are likely already familiar with the cycle and believe making a small mistake will make the abuser angry, so instead they may opt to stay quiet or not do something. No matter what is said or done, however, it seems like the victim is never right, and a small incident can lead to a difficult situation in seconds.

## Incident

At this stage, the victim says or does something the abuser feels upset about or threatened by, and the abuser attempts to dominate the victim through verbal, physical or sexual abuse. Victims may keep the incident a secret and not share what happened with others. In some cases, a victim of abuse can end up requiring medical attention such as being hospitalised and may even lie to medical personnel about the cause of their injuries.

## Reconciliation

At this point, the abuser might feel remorse, guilt or fear, and try to excuse their behaviour and initiate a reconciliation. This can involve them buying flowers or gifts, taking the victim out for dinner, or suggesting a holiday. They often promise it will be the last time the abuse happens. The victim experiences pain, humiliation, disrespect and fear, and may be staying for financial reasons or because children are involved. The abuser stresses that they did not want to do what they did, but the victim made them because of their lack of understanding, wrong behaviour or because 'they do not listen'.

## Calm/honeymoon

Also known as the honeymoon stage, an abuser may act as if nothing has happened, or they might 'turn on the charm'. This peaceful honeymoon phase may give the victim hope that the abuser has really changed this time. An abuser then starts to find little flaws or behaviours that they criticize in a passive-aggressive way and apologies become less sincere over time. Little by little the same behaviours begin to reappear, and the cycle again returns to the tension-building phase.

For many victims, the abuser's apologies and loving gestures in between the episodes of abuse can make it difficult to leave. They may believe that they are the only person who can help them, that the abuser will change their behaviour, and that they truly love them. Other victims may not experience this and feel trapped through fear.

# Understanding why victims don't leave abusive relationships or ask for help

**By understanding the many barriers that stand in the way of a victim leaving an abusive relationship, asking for help or disclosing to anyone, we can begin to support and empower victims to make the best decision for them. This may include using the codeword. At the same time we hold abusers solely accountable for their behaviour.**

These are just a few of the reasons that prevent victims from leaving or asking for help.



## **Danger and fear**

One of the most important reasons victims don't leave is because it can be incredibly dangerous. The fear that is felt is very real and there is a huge rise in the likelihood of violence after separation. 55% of the women killed by their ex-partner or ex-spouse in 2017 were killed within the first month of separation and 87% in the first year (Femicide Census, 2018).<sup>1</sup> In 2018/19, 80 women and 16 men were recorded as being victims of homicide by a current or ex-partner.<sup>2</sup>



## **Isolation**

Domestic abuse often relies on isolating the victim. The abuser works to weaken the connections with family, friends and professionals, making it extremely difficult to seek support. Abusers will often try to reduce the victim's contact with the outside world to prevent them from recognising that their behaviour is abusive and wrong. Isolation leads the victim to become extremely dependent on the abuser.



## **Shame, embarrassment or denial**

Abusers are often well respected or liked in their communities because they are charming and manipulative. This prevents people recognising the abuse and isolates the victim further. The abuser often minimises, denies or blames the abuse on the victim. Victims may be ashamed or make excuses to themselves and others to cover up the abuse. There may be an additional barrier for LGBT+ people who are unaware that domestic abuse can occur in same-sex relationships, and therefore do not acknowledge their experience as abuse.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk>

<sup>2</sup> <https://femicidescensus.org/>

# Understanding why victims don't leave abusive relationships or ask for help



## Trauma and low confidence

Imagine being told every day that you're worthless and the impact that this has on your self-esteem. Victims have very limited freedom to make decisions in an abusive relationship. They are often traumatised and regularly told "you couldn't manage on your own, you need me." Fear is constant and they live in a world of everyday terror.



## The support isn't there when they need it

Asking for help is not easy. Misunderstandings about domestic abuse often prevent people from knowing what to do, how to talk about it or where to direct victims disclosing abuse.



## Practical reasons

Abusers often control every aspect of their victim's life, making it impossible to have a job or financial independence. By controlling access to money, victims are left unable to support themselves or their children. They may fear having their children taken away, or if they have an insecure immigration status, being deported.



# The nature and impact of domestic abuse

**An estimated 2.4 million adults experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2019, of whom 1.6 million were women and 786,000 were men.<sup>3</sup>**

In the same year, police recorded 746,219 domestic abuse-related crimes – an increase of 24% from the previous year.

Women aged 20 to 24 years were significantly more likely to be victims of any domestic abuse in the last year than women aged 25 years and over. Men aged between 16 and 19 were more likely to experience domestic abuse than any other age group of men.

Adults with a disability were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year than those without. This was true for both men (7.1% compared with 3.3%, respectively) and women (13.8% compared with 6.4%, respectively).

There were 366 domestic homicides from the year ending March 2016 to the year ending March 2018. Of these, 270 victims were female and 96 were male. This is a slight increase from previous years. This equates to approximately 11 women a month and 4 men a month being killed by a current or ex-intimate partner.

130,000 children live in homes where there is high-risk domestic abuse.<sup>4</sup>

62% of children living with domestic abuse are directly harmed by the abuser, in addition to the harm caused by witnessing the abuse of others.<sup>5</sup>

On average, victims at high risk of serious harm or being murdered live with domestic abuse for 2 to 3 years before getting help.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>3</sup> The crime survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

<sup>4</sup> SafeLives (2015), Getting it right first time: policy report.

<sup>5</sup> Caada (2014), In Plain Sight.

<sup>6</sup> SafeLives (2015), Insights Idva National Dataset 2013-14.

# The nature and impact of domestic abuse

46.2% of women in refuges had spent between 2 and 10 years in the abusive relationship, with 17% of women enduring a violent relationship for more than 10 years.<sup>7</sup> Male victims suffer abuse for an average of 6 years before reaching out.<sup>8</sup>

40% to 60% of women experiencing domestic violence are abused while pregnant.<sup>9</sup>

Conviction data for image based sexual abuse (commonly referred to as 'revenge pornography') show that out of the 464 prosecutions for this offence recorded in the year ending March 2018, 86% (400) were flagged as being domestic abuse-related.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>7</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk>

<sup>8</sup> ManKind Initiative helpline.

<sup>9</sup> CEMACH, Saving Mothers' Lives report, 2005 Chapter 13.

<sup>10</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2018.

# Challenging the myths

These are just a few of the many myths around domestic abuse.

## **Myth:**

If it was that bad, they'd leave

**Reality:** Victims remain in abusive relationships for many different reasons, and it can be very difficult and dangerous for a victim to leave an abusive partner, even if they want to. Like any other relationship, one that ends in abuse began with falling in love and being in love. Abuse rarely starts at the beginning of a relationship, but when it is established it is often harder to leave. The victim may be in love with their partner and believe them when they say they are sorry and it won't happen again. They may be frightened for their life or for the safety of their children if they leave. They may have nowhere to go or have no financial independence. Abusers often isolate their partners from family and friends in order to control them, making it even more difficult for a victim of abuse to exit the relationship.

## **Myth:**

Domestic abuse always involves physical violence

**Reality:** Domestic abuse does not always include physical violence. The UK government defines domestic abuse as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner. These incidents can include coercive control, psychological and emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, harassment, stalking, and online or digital abuse.

## **Myth:**

Alcohol and drugs make people more violent

**Reality:** Alcohol and drugs can make existing abuse worse, or be a catalyst for an assault, but they do not cause domestic abuse. Many people use alcohol or drugs and do not abuse their partner, so it should never be used to excuse violent or controlling behaviour. The abuser alone is responsible for their actions.

# Challenging the myths

## **Myth:**

They can still be a good parent even if they are a domestic abuser. The parents' relationship doesn't have to affect the children

**Reality:** An estimated 90% of children whose mothers are abused witness the abuse. The effects are traumatic and long-lasting. Between 40% and 70% of these children are also direct victims of the abuse that is happening at home<sup>11</sup>.

## **Myth:**

Domestic abuse is a private family matter, and not a social issue

**Reality:** Domestic abuse incurs high costs for society – such as on hospital treatment, medication, court proceedings, lawyers' fees and imprisonment.

Domestic abuse happens every single day all over the world, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background. It is a serious, widespread crime. Despite this, many organisations are still campaigning to ensure that survivors' voices

are heard. When we describe domestic abuse as a “private family matter”, we minimise, condone and permit it.

## **Myth:**

Only women experience domestic abuse

**Reality:** While the majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated by men against women, men are also subject to abuse by female partners, and both men and women experience abuse from same-sex partners.

## **Myth:**

People often lie about abuse

**Reality:** False allegations about domestic abuse are extremely rare.

This myth is extremely damaging, because the fear of being called a liar can and does deter victims from reporting the abuse they have experienced.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk>

# Challenging the myths

**Myth:**  
Abusers are  
mentally unwell

**Reality:** There is no research that supports this myth. Abuse and violence are a choice, and there is no excuse for them. Domestic abuse happens throughout every level of society, regardless of health, wealth or status.

**Myth:**  
Victims are attracted to  
abusive relationships

**Reality:** Domestic abuse is prevalent throughout society, and it is not uncommon for an individual to experience abuse in more than one relationship. To suggest that some victims are particularly attracted to abusive individuals is victim-blaming. A perpetrator of domestic abuse can be charming and charismatic when they first meet a new partner, and often no one – let alone the individual they have just met – would suspect they would ever be abusive in a relationship.

**Myth:**  
Domestic abuse isn't  
that common

**Reality:** Domestic abuse is very common. On average, 11 women and 4 men a month are killed by their partner or former partner in England and Wales.

Domestic abuse has a higher rate of repeat victimisation than any other crime, and on average, the police receive over 100 emergency calls relating to domestic abuse every hour<sup>12</sup>.

1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

**Myth:**  
Domestic abuse is a 'crime  
of passion' – a momentary  
loss of control

**Reality:** Domestic abuse is rarely about losing control but rather about taking control. Abusive individuals rarely act spontaneously when angry. They consciously choose when to abuse their victim – when they are alone, and when there are no witnesses (if there is a witness, then usually they are a child). They have control over the person they are abusing.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/how-common-is-domestic-abuse/>

# Challenging the myths

## Myth:

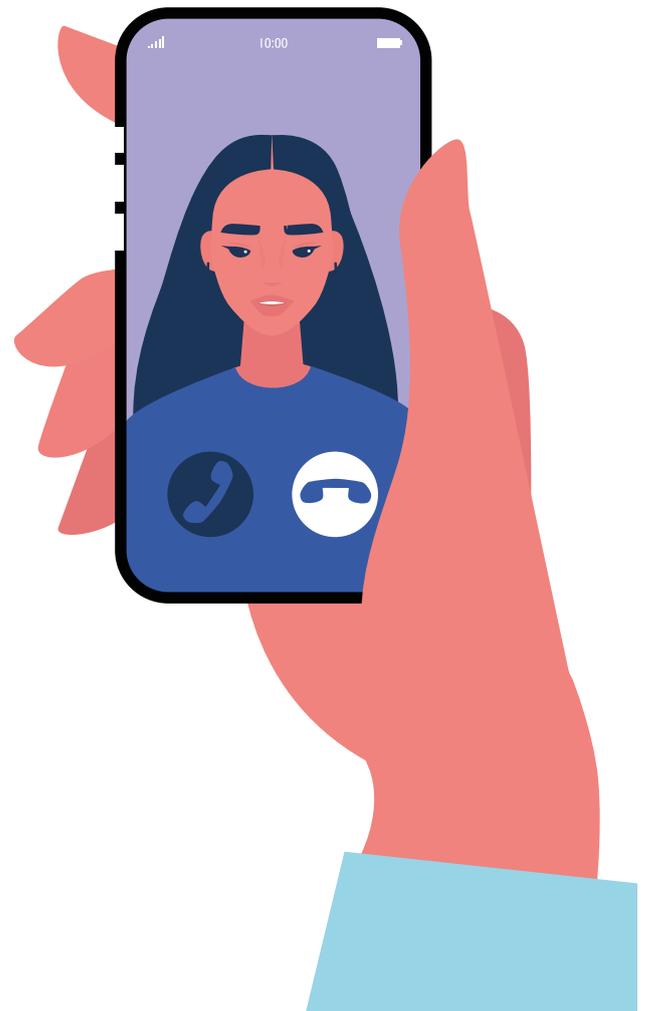
All couples argue – it's not domestic abuse, it's just a normal relationship

**Reality:** Abuse and disagreement are not the same things. Different opinions are normal and completely acceptable in healthy relationships. Abuse is not a disagreement – it is the use of physical, sexual, emotional or psychological violence or threats in order to govern and control another person's thinking, opinions, emotions and behaviour.

## Myth:

A carer would never hurt someone they were caring for

**Reality:** People with a disability are more likely to experience domestic abuse than those without. Domestic abuse can be perpetrated by family members who have taken on a caring responsibility.



# How you can support victims of domestic abuse in your community

## You can assist victims of domestic abuse by adopting the Ask for ANI codeword scheme.

By letting your customers know that they can use the codeword in your pharmacy, you will give victims a clear, discreet way to ask for immediate help.

By making your consultation room available as a private, quiet place where a victim can go to be helped to call the police or a domestic abuse helpline, you will give victims privacy and safety to access the support they need.

You may also want to consider adopting the [Safe Spaces scheme](#), which is run by Hestia and supports pharmacies to signpost victims to guidance and advice. The Ask for ANI scheme is designed to work well alongside the Safe Spaces scheme.

By making sure your staff know about domestic abuse and how to assist victims who use the codeword, you will help them to respond to victims of this hidden crime that affects so many people in our communities. You may also be helping staff who are victims or abusers themselves to access help and support.

For information on how to adopt the Ask for ANI scheme, go to: [www.gov.uk/homeoffice/pharmacy-codeword-scheme](http://www.gov.uk/homeoffice/pharmacy-codeword-scheme)



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