



# Campaigner Toolkit

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women's aid

campaign champions 

# Welcome

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Welcome to the Come Together to End Abuse campaign! We have created this toolkit to help you do 5 simple but important things to help us end domestic abuse.

We know that domestic abuse is devastatingly common. **1.6 million women** experience domestic abuse every year, though that's only the tip of the iceberg, as so many women don't report abuse due to fear or the worry they'll be judged or not believed. With **three women being killed a fortnight** by a current or ex-partner, so much needs to change before women are safe.

Come Together to End Domestic Abuse is the Women's Aid 50th birthday campaign. The organisation will celebrate its 50th in 2024 - and by launching the campaign in 2022, we wanted to demonstrate how we can make a difference if we come together across society and across communities to do what we can.

There is no magic wand that will solve the significant societal issue that is domestic abuse. As experts working on this for nearly half a century, we know that is the reality. Domestic abuse affects people throughout society and at every stage of life. What we need is for people to come together, to step up, and do what they can in their communities and workplaces to end domestic abuse. We need to reach all women and children, and ensure we are as accessible as possible in our work.

As Women's Aid heads towards its 50th birthday, we are asking everyone if they will **Come Together to End Domestic Abuse.**



## Come Together To End Domestic Abuse

# 5 things everyone can do

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**1. Make a change where you are** – workplace, school, sports club – is there a domestic abuse policy? Is there a poster in the bathroom or in communal spaces on how to get help? Has anyone had domestic abuse training? How about nominating Women's Aid training in your workplace? For more information, contact our fundraising team on [fundraising@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@womensaid.org.uk).

**2. Dispel myths about domestic abuse and challenge sexism** – domestic abuse doesn't happen because you provoked them, and it isn't your fault if you are being abused by your partner – sexist attitudes to women's roles and men's role must be challenged to end domestic abuse.

**3. Take action, your voice counts** – why not get your friends and family to join campaigns for better protection for survivors or fundraise to enable us to make a change. You can put on an event or take part in a challenge. You can also donate to Women's Aid here or your local member organisations. Find yours here.

**4. Learn what to say to someone experiencing abuse** – understand the reasons why it may not be easy to just leave.

**5. Speak up** – show we are standing up against domestic abuse together, send us photos and stories about what you are doing in your local area or online to help stop domestic abuse and support survivors. We want to show positive examples of how we can make a difference to encourage others to join with us.



# Dispelling myths about domestic abuse

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Domestic abuse is disproportionately perpetrated by men and experienced by women, because they are women. **[1]** This is why we talk about the gendered nature of abuse. It is predominantly about male violence against women.

Domestic abuse is a gendered crime as it is mainly perpetrated by men against women and girls. **92%** of defendants in domestic abuse-related prosecutions in the year ending March 2020 were recorded as male and the majority of the victims recorded as female (**77%**, compared with **16%** who were male). To understand the nature of domestic abuse and dispel myths around it, it is important to understand that domestic abuse happens within a wider system of gender inequality. It exists as part of the wider spectrum of violence against women and girls (VAWG), which includes different forms of violence perpetrated primarily by family members, such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called honour crimes.

Although we know that people of any gender may experience abuse, when we look at collective stories and experiences, we can see a pattern where men are more likely to be abusive towards women. Women are also considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of abuse, sexual violence, and coercive control. They are more likely to experience fear, and to be killed or seriously injured as a result.

## ▶ Examples of gender stereotypes:

- **Watch** – [This video](#) on gender roles and stereotypes (2 minutes).
- **Watch** – [This video](#) by Jordan Stephens, which explores the harmful impacts of masculinity (This video mentions suicide. It also discusses trauma as a potential root cause of abuse; however, even if someone has experienced trauma, perpetrating abuse is still a choice.) (2 minutes).
- **Read** – [This article](#) about the overall impact of sexism and racism on women (8 minutes).

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**[1]** Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales, year ending March 2019 (Office for National Statistics): **[Available online](#)**

# Challenging myths about domestic abuse

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Myth

VS

Reality

If it was that **bad**,  
she'd **leave**

Women stay in abusive  
relationships for **many**  
**different reasons**

Women stay with abusive partners for many different reasons, as one of the most dangerous times for women is leaving. Like any other relationship, one that ends in abuse often began with falling in love and being in love. Abuse rarely starts at the beginning of a relationship, but when it is already established and often harder to leave.

A woman may still be in love with her partner and believe him when he says he is sorry and it won't happen again; she may be frightened for her life or for the safety of her children if she leaves; she may have nowhere to go; she may have no financial independence. Abusers often isolate their partners from family and friends in order to control them, making it even more difficult for an abused woman to exit the relationship.

Myth

VS

Reality

Domestic abuse always  
involves **physical**  
**violence**

Domestic abuse **does**  
**not always** include  
**physical violence**

## The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines domestic abuse as:

"Behaviour of a person ("**A**") towards another person ("**B**") is "domestic abuse" if:

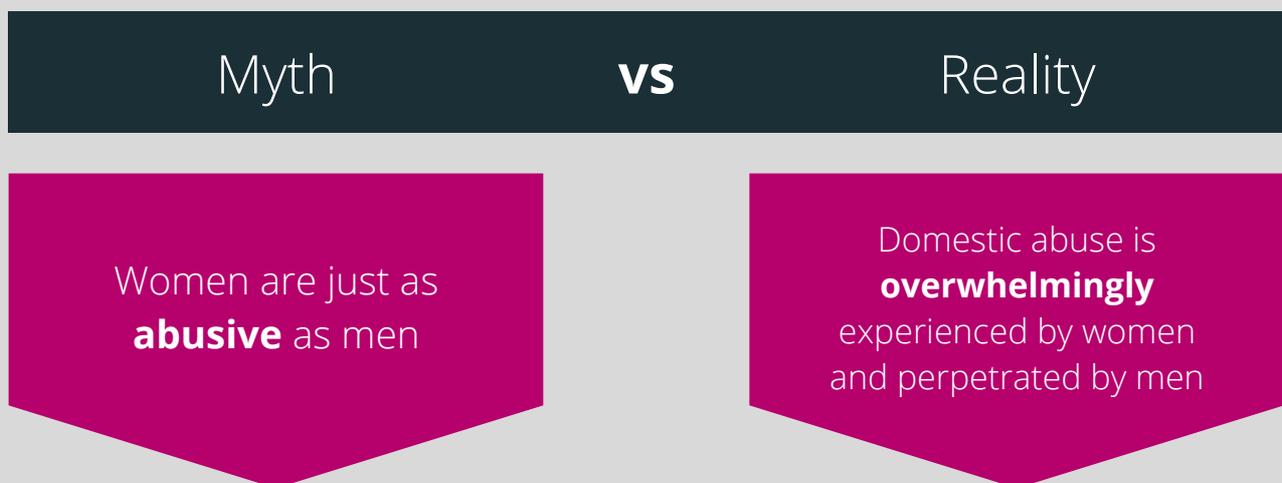
- (a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and
- (b) the behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following:

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

It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

For the purposes of this Act, A's behaviour may be behaviour "towards" B despite the fact that it consists of conduct directed at another person (for example, B's child)." [2]



In the year ending March 2019, the majority of defendants in domestic abuse-related prosecutions were men (**92%**), and the majority of victims were female (**75%**) (in **10%** of cases the sex of the victim was not recorded) (ONS, 2019). It is a gendered crime which is deeply rooted in the societal inequality between women and men.

**Women are more likely than men to experience multiple incidents of abuse, different types of domestic abuse, and sexual violence in particular.**

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[2] Definition of "domestic abuse" [Available online](#)

Research also demonstrates that gay men experience higher levels of abuse than heterosexual men, and trans and non-binary people also experience disproportionate levels of abuse. Bisexual and lesbian women also experience disproportionately high levels of abuse compare to heterosexual women ([Galop, 2018](#)).

| Myth                                           | VS | Reality                                         |
|------------------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------------------|
| Domestic abuse <b>isn't</b> that <b>common</b> |    | Domestic abuse is <b>endemic</b> in our society |

On average, **a woman is killed by her male partner or former partner every four days** in England and Wales. Women are more likely to suffer multiple incidents of domestic abuse than any other crime, and on average, the police receive over 100 emergency calls relating to domestic abuse every hour.

An estimated **1.6 million women** experienced some form of domestic abuse in the year ending March 2019. An estimated **28.4%** of women aged 16 to 59 years have experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16 years (ONS, 2019).

| Myth                                                                        | VS | Reality                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Domestic abuse is a <b>'crime of passion'</b> , a momentary loss of control |    | Domestic abuse is rarely about losing control, but <b>taking control</b> |

Abusive men rarely act spontaneously when angry. Domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviours and tactics used to control and abuse.

Find out more about this [here](#).

Myth

VS

Reality

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

Abuse and disagreements are **not** the same thing

Arguments are normal and completely acceptable in healthy relationships. Abuse is not a disagreement – it is the use of physical, sexual, emotional and/or psychological harm or threats in order to control another person's thinking, opinions, emotions and behaviour. When abuse is involved, there is no discussion between equals. There is fear of the consequences of saying or doing the 'wrong' thing.

► Find out more about the characteristics of domestic abuse below:

- **Read** – [This article](#) on why domestic abuse is a “man’s problem” and what men can do challenge domestic abuse (15 minutes).



# Challenging victim-blaming

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## What is victim-blaming?

Victim-blaming is the idea that the victim of domestic abuse is to blame for the abuse they experience. Often an abuser will blame their victim for their abusive behaviour, which is another tactic to control a victim.



What was she **wearing**?

Why doesn't she **just leave**?

What does **she expect** if she cheated on him?

She **provoked** him.

**You made me** do it.

Abuse is never the fault of the survivor – and if we want to create a world where abuse is no longer tolerated, we all have a role to play.

One thing we can do is to **challenge victim-blaming** when we come across it. It is important that we only challenge when we feel safe to do so.

A common victim-blaming attitude is that survivors are responsible for the abuse because they haven't left a relationship. You can challenge victim-blaming in a constructive way: by reframing the issue, by re-focusing on the actions of the perpetrator, by encouraging the other person to develop empathy for survivors and by bringing in the role of the community.

Survivors are more likely to feel they can speak out if they are around people who are proactively starting conversations about abuse. You can choose to break the silence and start raising awareness about different types of abuse and challenging unhelpful ideas about the causes of abuse and victim-blaming attitudes.

# Victim blaming **attitude**

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Why don't they just leave?  
If it was that bad I would just leave.

## How to **challenge** victim-blaming

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Bring the perpetrator into the conversation

"Why does he feel it's acceptable to abuse his partner?"

"Why should it be up to the survivor to leave the relationship? Isn't the perpetrator responsible for his actions?"

Encourage them to think about things from the survivor's perspective

"Leaving a relationship can be really scary and full of uncertainty"

"Not every survivor knows how to leave, or wants to leave. They still deserve to be safe."

Bring in the community

"There are so many barriers to leaving. What can we do to make it easier for survivors to access support and leave abusive partners if they want to?"

► **Find out more about the characteristics of domestic abuse below:**

- **Watch** - [This animated video](#) on examples of victim blaming in relation to rape and sexual assault, why it occurs, why it is harmful and how we can reframe statements to hold perpetrators accountable (This resource gives examples of common victim blaming attitudes and discusses rape.) (3 minutes 30 seconds).
- **Read** - [This article](#) which explores the “Just-World” theory to offer explanations of why we victim blame (14 minutes).
- **Watch** - [This video](#) on the impacts of victim blaming in the media (12 minutes). (This video mentions the murder of domestic abuse victims, including children.)
- **Read** - [This article](#) by Janey Starling from [Level Up](#) (8 minutes) or [this one](#) critiquing how the media writes about the deaths of domestic abuse victims (10 minutes).
- **Watch** - [This TED Talk](#) by Jane Gilmore on how the media blames victims (13 minutes). (This video mentions domestic abuse, the murder of domestic abuse victims including children, suicide, rape and child sexual abuse.)



# How to **respond** to someone experiencing abuse

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We all have the power to create change in our communities – big and small. You are the expert on your community and what it needs; and Women's Aid is here to support you to ensure that survivors in your community get the support they deserve.

Unfortunately, many survivors have to make the difficult decision to speak out multiple times and re-live their trauma before they get a supportive response and each unhelpful response makes it harder to speak out the next time. We want women to get the right response first time when they speak up about abuse.

Women experiencing abuse need support and understanding – not judgement. When someone receives a supportive response, they are more likely to take the next step and access specialist help if they wish to. We all have the power to provide a supportive response.

## **Unhelpful responses:**

An unhelpful response is one in which the disclosure or the abuse is not taken seriously; the survivor is made feel they are to blame for the abuse, or they are further disempowered in some way, or the perpetrator is not held to account for their actions. When responding to disclosures, even if we have the best of intentions, we might say something that sounds disbelieving or minimising of the abuse, or share some unhelpful ideas about abuse we've heard that puts the blame on the victim. We might also tell them what we think they should do. These kinds of responses are invalidating and they act as barriers – discouraging the survivor from speaking out again and seeking help.

## **Responses that act as barriers**

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“ Why doesn't she **just leave?** ”

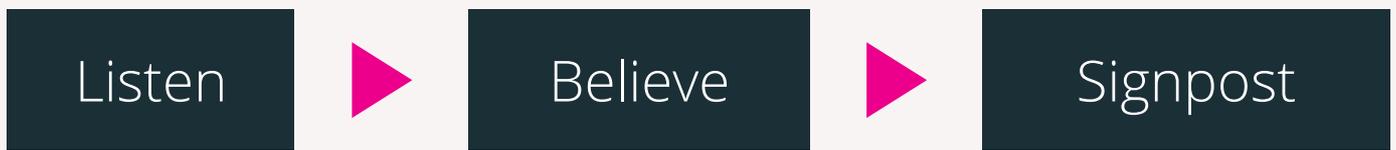
“ **But** he's such a devoted father...”

“ I think you **should...** ”

“ I'm not getting involved, it's **just** relationship drama...”

## Helpful responses

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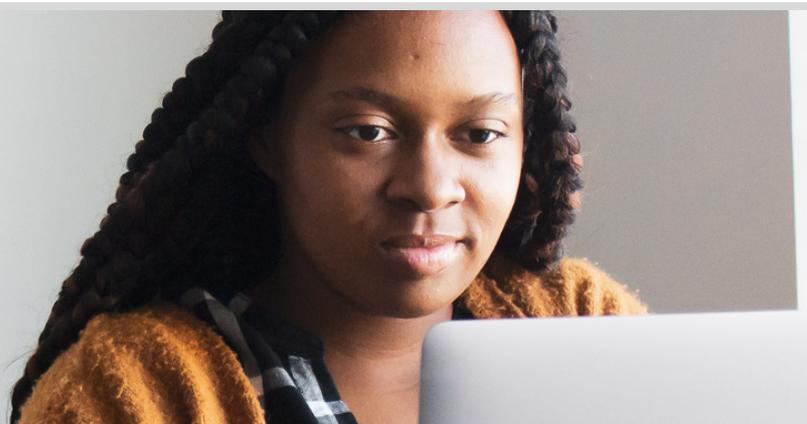
## Providing a supportive response to survivors

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When responding to disclosures it is important to:

- **Be willing to listen to, believe and validate** survivors' experiences and give a compassionate, non-judgmental response. It is essential to treat people equally, while recognising that people will have different backgrounds and different needs, that intersect with each other – for example Black and minoritised survivors, and deaf and disabled survivors.
- **Ensure that it is safe** to have the conversation– do not do anything that will put the survivor at risk. Offer the survivor a more private space to speak if you can.
- **Be present** and concentrate on what the survivor is saying. If now isn't a good time, communicate that and arrange a better time when you are less likely to be distracted.
- **Consider your body language and facial expressions and non-verbal communication.** Pay attention. Don't be distracted and try not to fidget. Try and remain calm, even though it might be a difficult or upsetting experience. Many survivors will be very in tune with reading body language and will know when they aren't being listened to.
- **Recognise that everyone is the expert in their own lives** and is entitled to make their own decisions in their own time. Let them share what they want and need to at their own pace. Reassure them that they will not be pressured to do anything they don't feel comfortable with.

- **Ask open questions:** e.g. “How did it feel when...”; ask them what they need.
- **Avoid why questions** (they make people feel interrogated/judged/blamed). Also avoid asking too many questions. It is not your job to find out what happened, but to offer support to the survivor.
- **Use reflection, paraphrasing and summarizing** to check for understanding e.g. “So you said x, and mentioned y. We’ve also discussed... What I’ve heard you say is...”
- **Use appropriate affirmation** – “I understand” or “thank you for telling me” “It sounds like you were being very brave.” Tell them they are not to blame for the abuse that they are experiencing, and that there is support available if they wish to access it.
- **Do not tell survivors what to do or pressure them** to reach out if they are not ready. Some survivors simply want to be listened to and validated, whereas others may want to explore their options. You can help survivors empower themselves by offering options and information, such as resources on domestic abuse (like the **Power and Control Wheel** or the **Women’s Aid website**) as well as details about specialist domestic abuse services. However, it may be that someone does not want to access any services at the time, and this must be respected.
- **Be trustworthy and capable of keeping things confidential.** Sharing things with others that a survivor has told you in confidence may put them at more risk. The only time you should break someone’s confidence is if there is a safeguarding risk (see section below).
- **Maintain personal boundaries.** Understand where your responsibilities end. It is not your role to make referrals for a survivor; be a point of contact within your community or to give ongoing support to someone you don’t know. It is also really important that you keep yourself safe, so don’t be tempted to offer your home up as a place to stay or confront a perpetrator.
- **Look after yourself and seek support if you need it.** Talking about abuse can be difficult and you may be tempted to take on too much, however looking after yourself and your own wellbeing is essential. Please look after yourselves and don’t do anything you feel uncomfortable with or put yourself or anyone else at risk. You can find support for yourself **here**.



# Boundaries are the most important parts of self-care

It is quite simple what survivors want – to be **listened to, believed, validated, supported and enabled to make decisions** for themselves at their own pace. For many survivors, listening is the most important thing you can do.

## Understanding confidentiality and safeguarding:

Generally speaking, everything a survivor shares with you should be kept private. If someone chooses to disclose to you, it will be because you are someone that person feels they can trust - so **confidentiality is key**. Breaking someone's trust makes it less likely that the survivor will tell anyone else about their experiences, can make them feel increasingly isolated and may put them at further risk from the perpetrator.

We all have a role to play in keeping each other safe in society. To help keep others safe, there may be times when we have to break someone's trust and get help.

- In an emergency, phone 999.
- If you are worried about a child or a vulnerable adult, contact your local social services.

**If you are unsure, get advice.** You can contact the following places if you would like to discuss a non-emergency scenario:

- **Women's Aid Live Chat:** [chat.womensaid.org.uk/](https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/)
- National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247
- The [NSPCC](https://www.nspcc.org.uk) when your concerns are about a child
- You may be able to give a hypothetical situation to your local social services

► **Read or watch one or more of the following resources on listening:**

- **Watch** – [This video](#) on active listening (2 minutes).
- **Watch** – [This animated video](#) by Brene Brown on empathy (3 minutes).
- **Read** – [This article](#) on how to listen without judgement (8 minutes).
- **Read** – [This article](#) about empathetic listening (11 minutes).

## After supporting someone

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It can be very difficult hearing about other people's experiences of abuse, especially if we are close to them. Feeling upset and/or powerless by another person's pain is normal and healthy. If you have received a disclosure, or have been supporting a survivor of abuse, it is important to consider what it is you need and what you are going to do to look after yourself. It's important not to put pressure on yourself and remind yourself it's not your role to solve things – the survivor was managing their own situation before they spoke to you and will continue to do so afterwards.





# Come Together To End Domestic Abuse

**Coming together** across society and communities to **end domestic abuse**

## Does your partner:

- isolate you from friends and family?
- deprive you of food or heating?
- monitor your time?
- check up on what you do online?
- take control over aspects of your everyday life, telling you where you can go, who you can see, what you can wear and when you can sleep?
- stop you from getting medical help or support?
- repeatedly put you down, such as saying you're worthless?
- humiliate or degrade you?
- control your money and access to your home?
- make threats or intimidate you?



It can be easy to miss the signs of a coercive, abusive relationship. I didn't know the signs, but I want to make sure that other women do. Please know there is help if you need it.

**Mel B, patron of  
Women's Aid**

Support is available at:  
[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

**You are not alone.**

**#EndAbuseTogether**

**women's aid**  
until women & children are safe