

Guidance notes for DASH

You may be looking at this checklist because you are working in a professional capacity with a victim of domestic abuse. These notes are to help you understand the significance of the questions on the checklist. Domestic abuse can take many forms but it is usually perpetrated by men towards women in an intimate relationship such as boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife. This checklist can also be used for lesbian, gay, bisexual relationships and for situations of 'honour'-based violence or family violence. Domestic abuse can include physical, emotional, mental, sexual or financial abuse as well as stalking and harassment. They might be experiencing one or all types of abuse; each situation is unique. It is the combination of behaviours that can be so intimidating. It can occur both during a relationship or after it has ended.

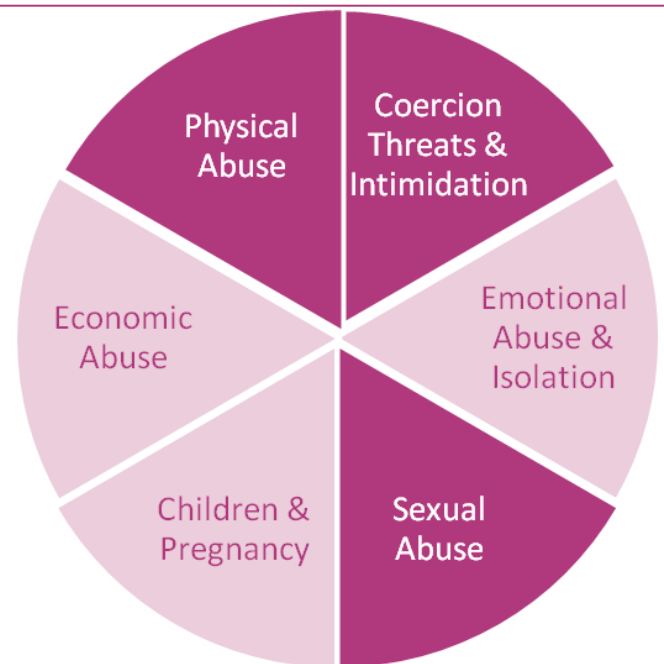
- ✓ The purpose of DASH is to give a consistent and simple tool for practitioners who work with adult victims of domestic abuse in order to help them identify those who are at high risk of harm and whose cases should be referred to a MARAC meeting in order to manage their risk. If you are concerned about risk to a child or children, you should make a referral to ensure that a full assessment of their safety and welfare is made.
- ✓ DASH should be introduced to the victim within the framework of your agency's:
 - Confidentiality Policy
 - Information Sharing Policy and Protocols
 - MARAC Referral Policies and Protocols
- ✓ Before you begin to ask the questions:
 - Establish how much time the victim has to talk to you? Is it safe to talk now? What are safe contact details?
 - Establish the whereabouts of the perpetrator and children;
 - Explain why you are asking these questions and how it relates to the MARAC
- ✓ Whilst you are asking the questions:
 - Identify early on who the victim is frightened of – ex-partner/partner/family member
 - Use gender neutral terms such as partner/ex-partner. By creating a safe, accessible environment LGBT victims accessing the service will feel able to disclose both domestic abuse and their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- ✓ Revealing the results of DASH to the victim: Telling someone that they are at high risk of serious harm or homicide may be frightening and overwhelming for them to hear. It is important that you state what your concerns are by using the answers they gave to you and your professional judgement. It is then important that you follow your area's protocols when referring to MARAC and Children's Services. Equally, identifying that someone is not currently high risk needs to be managed carefully to ensure that the person doesn't feel that their situation is being minimised and that they don't feel embarrassed about asking for help. Explain that these factors are linked to homicide and serious harm and that if s/he experiences any of them in future, that they should get back in touch with your service or with the emergency services on 999 in an immediate crisis.
- ✓ Please pay particular attention to a practitioner's professional judgement in all cases. The results from a checklist are not a definitive assessment of risk. They should provide you with a structure to inform your judgement and act as prompts to further questioning, analysis and risk management whether via a MARAC or in another way.
- ✓ **Resources:** Be sure that you have an awareness of the safety planning measures you can offer, both within your own agency and other agencies. Be familiar with local and national resources to refer the victim to, including specialist services. The following websites and contact details may be useful to you:
 - ✓ LDASS – www.ldass.org.uk– 01522 510014
 - ✓ www.domesticabuselincsire.com

We ask about **PHYSICAL ABUSE** in questions 1, 13, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22 & 26

- ✓ Physical abuse can take many forms from a push or shove to a punch, use of weapons, choking or strangulation.
- ✓ You should try and establish if the abuse is getting worse, or happening more often, or the incidents themselves are more serious. If your client is not sure, ask them to document how many incidents there have been in the last year and what took place. They should also consider keeping a diary marking when physical and other incidents take place.
- ✓ Try and get a picture of the range of physical abuse that has taken place. The incident that is currently being disclosed may not be the worst thing to have happened.
- ✓ The abuse might also be happening to other people in their household, such as their children or siblings or elderly relatives.
- ✓ Sometimes violence will be used against a family pet.
- ✓ If an incident has just occurred the victim should call 999 for assistance from the police. If the victim has injuries they should try and get them seen and documented by a health professional such as GP or A&E Nurse.

We ask about whether the victim is experiencing any form of **SEXUAL ABUSE** in question 19

- ✓ Sexual abuse can include the use of threats, force or intimidation to obtain sex, deliberately inflicting pain during sex, or combining sex and violence and using weapons.
- ✓ If the victim has suffered sexual abuse you should encourage them to get medical attention and to report this to the police. See above for advice on finding a Sexual Assault Referral Centre which can assist with medical and legal investigations.



COERCION, THREATS AND INTIMIDATION is covered in questions 2, 3, 6, 8, 17, 20, 21, 22, 26 & 27.

- ✓ It is important to understand and establish: the fears of the victim/victims in relation to what the perpetrator/s may do; who they are frightened of and who they are frightened for (i.e. children/siblings). Victims usually know the abusers behaviour better than anyone else which is why this question is significant.
- ✓ In cases of 'Honour' Based Violence there may be more than one abuser living in the home or belonging to the wider family and community. This could also include female relatives.
- ✓ Stalking and harassment becomes more significant when the abuser is also making threats to harm themselves, the victim or others. They might use phrases such as "If I can't have you no one else can..."
- ✓ Other examples of behaviour that can indicate future harm include obsessive phone calls, texts or emails, uninvited visits to the victim's home, workplace etc, loitering and destroyed or vandalised property.
- ✓ Advise the victim to keep a diary of these threats, when and where they happen, if anyone else was with them and if the threats made them feel frightened.
- ✓ Separation is a dangerous time: establish if the victim has tried to separate from the abuser or has been threatened about the consequences of leaving. Being pursued after separation can be particularly dangerous.
- ✓ Victims of domestic abuse sometimes tell us that the perpetrators harm pets, damage furniture and this alone makes them frightened without the perpetrator needing to physically hurt them. This kind of intimidation is common and often used as a way to control and frighten.
- ✓ Some perpetrators of domestic abuse do not follow court orders or contact arrangements with children. Previous violations may be associated with an increase in risk of future violence.
- ✓ Some victims feel frightened and intimidated by the criminal history of their partner/ex-partner. It is important to remember that offenders with a history of violence are at increased risk of harming their partner, even if the past violence was not directed towards intimate partners or family members, except for 'honour'-based violence, where the perpetrator(s) will commonly have no other recorded criminal history.

ECONOMIC ABUSE – Question 23

- ✓ Victims of domestic abuse often tell us that they are financially controlled by their partners/ex-partners. Consider how the financial control impacts on the safety options available to them. For example, they may rely on their partner/ex-partner for an income or do not have access to benefits in their own right. The victim might feel like the situation has become worse since their partner/ex-partner lost their job.
- ✓ The Citizens Advice Bureau or the local specialist domestic abuse support service will be able to outline to the victim the options relating to their current financial situation and how they might be able to access funds in their own right.



CHILDREN & PREGNANCY – Questions 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 & 20 refer to being pregnant and children and whether there is conflict over child contact.

- ✓ The presence of children including step children can increase the risk of domestic abuse for the mother. They too can get caught up in the violence and suffer directly.
- ✓ Physical violence can occur for the first time or get worse during pregnancy or for the first few years of the child's life. There are usually lots of professionals involved during this time, such as health visitors or midwives, who need to be aware of the risks to the victim and children, including an unborn child.
- ✓ The perpetrator may use the children to have access to the victim, abusive incidents may occur during child contact visits or there may be a lot of fear and anxiety that the children may be harmed.
- ✓ Please follow your local Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for identifying and making referrals to Children's Services.

We ask about **EMOTIONAL ABUSE** and **ISOLATION** in questions 4, 5 & 15. This can be experienced at the same time as the other types of abuse. It may be present on its own or it may have started long before any physical violence began. The result of this abuse is that victims can blame themselves and, in order to live with what is happening, minimise and deny how serious it is. As a professional you can assist the victim in beginning to consider the risks the victim and any children may be facing.

- ✓ The victim may be being prevented from seeing family or friends, from creating any support networks or prevented from having access to any money.
- ✓ Victims of 'honour' based violence talk about extreme levels of isolation and being 'policed' in the home. This is a significant indicator of future harm and should be taken seriously .
- ✓ Due to the abuse and isolation being suffered victims feel like they have no choice but to continue living with the abuser and fear what may happen if they try and leave. This can often have an impact on the victim's mental health and they might feel depressed or even suicidal.
- ✓ Equally the risk to the victim is greater if their partner/ex-partner has mental health problems such as depression and if they abuse drugs or alcohol. This can increase the level of isolation as victims can feel like agencies won't understand and will judge them. They may feel frightened that revealing this information will get them and their partner into trouble and, if they have children, they may worry that they will be removed. These risks are addressed in questions 21 & 22.

Guidance notes for S-DASH.

Stalking is defined as (NPCC/CPS 2018): **A pattern of unwanted, fixated and obsessive behaviour** which is intrusive. It can include harassment that amounts to stalking, or stalking that causes fear of violence or serious alarm or distress.

The S-DASH is not an assessment of the level risk like the DASH, however, it helps you to understand what risks there might be to your client regarding stalking, for example the duration of the stalking, the behaviours engaged in by the stalker, the details of the threats and/or violence, nature of unwanted 'gifts' left or sent to the client and the impact this may have on the client.

All of which allows you to be more informed and able to support them effectively.

National Stalking Helpline: Operated by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, the National Stalking Helpline gives practical information, support, and advice on risk, safety planning and legislation to victims of stalking, their friends, family, and professionals working with victims.

Free phone: 0808 802 0300 E-mail: advice@stalkinghelpline.org www.stalkinghelpline.org

Paladin: National Stalking Advocacy Service - Paladin is a service for high risk victims. High risk is defined as those who are at risk of serious harm and/or homicide.

Phone: 0203 866 4107 E-mail: info@paladinservice.co.uk www.paladinservice.co.uk

Professionals often refer to The 8 Stages of Homicide produced by Dr Jane Monkton Smith to understand the level of stalking, please visit [Domestic abuse resources – Professional resources \(lincolnshire.gov.uk\)](http://Domestic%20abuse%20resources%20-%20Professional%20resources%20(lincolnshire.gov.uk))

Risk Factor Definitions – What the Research Tells Us

Q1. Are you very frightened?

Research demonstrates that the victim is frequently the best assessor of risk posed to them (Weisz et al. 2000). Stalking often consists of behaviours that, when taken at face value, may appear to be quite ordinary (e.g. walking past the victim's house, asking the victim to go out on dates). With repetition, however, these behaviours can become menacing, and the victim can feel unsafe and threatened. In all cases (even those where no direct threat has been made or where the victim does not yet have a great deal of evidence) it is important that the extent of the victim's fear is recorded. Many victims state that it is the uncertainty of what the stalker will do next which causes them the most concern.

Q2. Is there a previous domestic abuse and/or stalking/harassment history? (involving you and/or anyone else that you know)

One of the best predictors of future behaviour is past behaviour and stalkers are no exception. Research shows that many victims will suffer more than 100 incidents before reporting to the police (Sheridan, 2005). Stalkers may also seem to stop stalking their victim (usually for reasons unclear to anyone but the stalker), only to suddenly resume the harassment at a later date.

Q3. Has (insert name of stalker(s).....) ever destroyed or vandalised any of your property?

A sizeable proportion of stalkers (up to two thirds) will damage their victim's property (Blaauw et al., 2002) and this includes stalking engaged in by adolescents (McCann, 2000). Property damage may be associated with rage or frustration (perhaps because the offender is unable to attack the victim directly), revenge, a desire to harm something the victim cares about (i.e. destroying her wedding photographs), a wish to undermine her belief in a safe environment (i.e. by cutting brake cables), as a form of threat, or it may be connected with breaking and entering the victim's property or spying on the victim.

Q4. Does (name of stalker(s).....) turn up at your workplace, home etc unannounced or uninvited more than three times per week?

Stalking rarely takes place at a distance. Research tells us that nearly all stalking cases will ultimately involve face-to-face contact between victim and stalker (Mullen et al., 2000). Some stalkers may appear or approach their victims regularly (i.e. on the victim's daily route to work). Others, particularly stalkers with an obvious mental illness, will appear in diverse places at unpredictable times (Sheridan and Boon, 2002). The research informs us that those stalkers who visit the victim's home, workplace, or other places frequented by the victim more than three times in a week are those who are most likely to attack.

Q5. Does (.....) follow you or loiter near your home, workplace etc?

Most stalkers will be seen by their victims. Such stalkers may be compiling victim-related information or tracking the victim's habits. Stalkers are a varied group and some will attempt to loiter secretly (even camping out on or in the victim's property), whilst others will make no attempt at concealment. Whether secretive or overt, whether mentally disordered or not, most stalkers will share a belief that their behaviour is an appropriate response to circumstances. If they do follow you or loiter near you, please keep a log of stalker sightings and behaviour.

Q6. Has (.....) made threats of physical or sexual violence?

Stalkers have been known to threaten violence months or even years into the future, and have indeed followed through on their threats. Stalkers frequently threaten their victim, either directly or indirectly. Examples of indirect threats include sending dead flowers or wreaths or violent images to the victim (often anonymously). Stalkers will often make specific written or verbal threats. **Research demonstrates that these should be taken particularly seriously:** 1 in 2 stalkers where there has been an intimate relationship, who make a threat, will act on it. Where there has been no relationship it is 1 in 10 (Mckenzie, McEwan, Pathé, James, Olgoff 2009).

Q7. Has (.....) stalked/harassed any third party since the stalking/harassment began? (e.g. your friends, family, children, colleagues, partners or neighbours of the victim)

On average, 21 people connected to the victim will be affected (Sheridan 2005). Stalkers will involve third parties for a number of reasons. For example, to upset the victim (i.e. by harassing the victim's children), to obtain information on the victim (i.e. by approaching the victim's friends), to remove perceived obstacles between the stalker and victim (i.e. by harassing the victim's partner), and/or to punish those perceived as helping or shielding the victim (i.e. work colleagues who state that the victim is not available).

Q8. Has (.....) acted violently to anyone else during the stalking incident?

Secondary victims will be identified in a majority of stalking cases, and these can be a valuable source of evidential information. Research suggests that third parties will be physically attacked by the stalker in between 6% and 17% of cases (Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, and Stuart 1999; Sheridan & Davies, 2001). Stalkers who attack those associated with the victim are more likely to also attack the primary victim. Persons perceived as preventing access to the victim or protecting the victim are at particular risk.

Q9. Has (.....) persuaded other people to help him/her? (wittingly or unwittingly)

The ability of a stalker to pose as other persons and/or to draw information out of third parties should never be underestimated. Many stalkers will devote hours each day to their stalking campaign, and are capable of stalking their victims for many years (Meloy, 1996). New technologies and social networking sites can facilitate harassment, enabling stalkers to impersonate another on-line; to send or post hostile material, misinformation and false messages (i.e. to Usenet groups); and to trick other internet users into harassing or threatening a victim (i.e. by posting the victim's personal details on a bulletin board along with a controversial invitation or message) (Sheridan and Grant, 2007).

Q10. Is (.....) known to be abusing drugs and/or alcohol?

Substance abuse by the stalker has been found to be associated with physical assault on the victim in a significant number of cases (Rosenfeld, 2004). The abuse of various substances by stalkers can contribute both to the basis from which the stalking occurs and to individual violent episodes. Binge drinking or drug taking may directly precede an attack, fuelling obsession, yearning or angry thought patterns, or by lending the stalker the confidence to approach or attack the victim.

Q11. Have they attempted/threatened suicide? (signs of finality and commitment)

Stalkers who threaten suicide – there is increased risk of murder to the victim. Look for finality. At the point they feel they are losing control. Homicide is the ultimate act of control.

Q12. Do you know if (.....) has been violent in the past? (This could be physical or psychological. Intelligence or reported)

One of the best predictors of future behaviour is past behaviour. It may not always be physical violence but could include the psychological impact as well. This might be in terms of coercive control and/or jealous surveillance of the victim (Regan, Kelly, Morris and Dibb 2007) if the stalker(s) feels a real sense of entitlement or ownership of the victim. Generally speaking, stalkers who have been violent before, whether as part of a stalking campaign or in relation to separate offences, are more likely to be violent again.